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THE RICE INSTITUTE PAMPHLET

Vol. XIII April, 1926 No. 2

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THE RICE INSTITUTE

A university of liberal and technical learning founded by William Marsh Rice in the City of Houston, Texas, and dedicated by him to the advancement of Letters, Science, and Art

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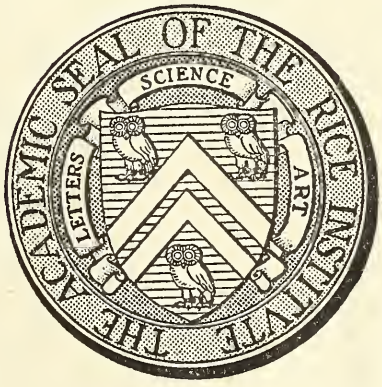

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LECTURES ON MODERN MUSIC[1]

I

MODERN FRENCH MUSIC

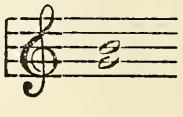
LET us agree that by our title we mean French music of the post-Franckian period, the period inaugurated by the works of Fauré and Debussy. The classification is, of course, arbitrary, for naturally there is no sharp line of demarcation between the music of to-day and the music of yesterday. Music, like life, is in constant evolution. Its transformation goes on incessantly, but the process is so gradual that, for the most part, we remain quite unconscious of the nature and extent of the changes which are taking place before our very eyes. We are too inattentive, our minds too passive, to observe or record, to say nothing of understanding, them. It is so much easier to rest contented with what we have already acquired than to change ever so slightly those routine but profound habits of thought and feeling which govern our life, and by which we live so blissfully because so unconsciously. This mental inertia is, perhaps, our greatest enemy. Insidiously it leads us to assume that we can renew our lives without renewing our habits; that we can listen to the music of Stravinsky with ears attuned only to the harmonies of Beethoven and Wagner. But we cannot.

Consequently no one can "explain" modern music, make

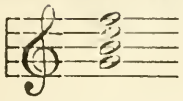
[1] Three lectures delivered under the auspices of the Lectureship in Music at the Rice Institute, in February, 1925, by Mlle. Nadia Boulanger, of Paris, France. The author gratefully acknowledges the kindness of Mr. Howard Hinners in editing the stenographic report of the lectures for publication.

it, by some miracle, immediately intelligible to people who have never heard a note of it or who will not make the effort to accustom themselves, by prolonged application, to new sonorities and, therefore, to new habits of hearing. All one can do is to try to stimulate the curiosity of those who have yet to make their first acquaintance with a modern score and to render more intelligent and precise the appreciation of those who have already learned to love a world of beauty in which they are not yet quite at home.

The harmony of modern music, especially its dissonance, is, of course, the chief stumbling block. That is natural and unavoidable, and the difficulties which it presents should not be under-estimated nor, on the other hand, exaggerated. The obstacle is obviously of a technical nature; it is a question of language, a matter of vocabulary and syntax and is therefore to be mastered like any linguistic problem—by the processes of mental and aural assimilation. To learn to speak a new language is difficult; but it is relatively easy to learn to understand it. So it is with modern harmony. At a first hearing, Stravinsky's "Sacred Rites of Spring" seems a mere uncoördinated mass of sound. But listen to it again and again and gradually the sense of confusion disappears. Little by little the "catching" quality of its themes and the electric force of the rhythms emerge, and the music becomes a thing so full of life and power that you marvel at your previous bewilderment.

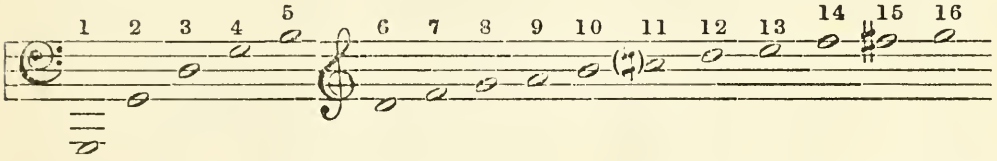
"The dissonances of to-day are the consonances of to-morrow"—an immemorial commonplace of musical history which every one knows in theory but whose force becomes apparent only by personal experience. To us it seems incredible that the interval of a third  was once considered harsh or that Monte-

verdi (1568-1643) should have had difficulty in securing *droit de cité* for the chord of the dominant seventh.

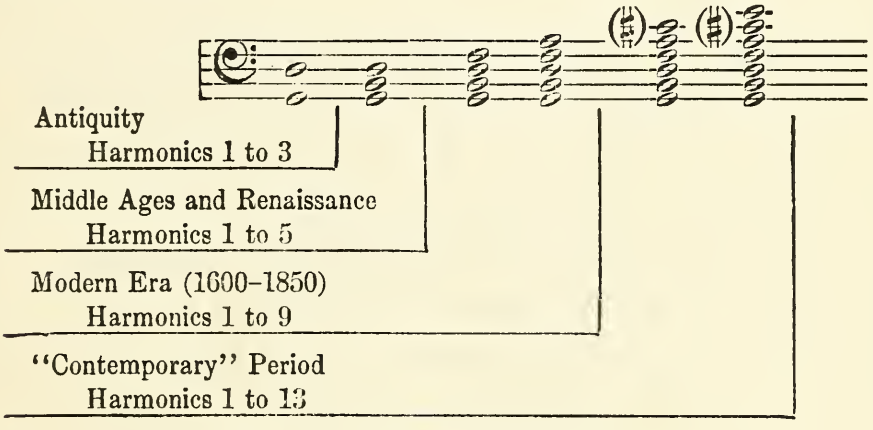


Yet we all know that such was the case and that such will always be the fate of every new "dissonance".

The history of harmony is the history of the development of the human ear, which has gradually assimilated, in their natural order, the successive intervals of the harmonic series:

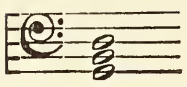


The platitudinous validity of the statement becomes obvious by comparison of the harmonic series with the following table, which gives—with only approximate accuracy—the chief diatonic chords in use during the successive periods of musical history.



At first, some of these chords, notably the last four, were employed only on certain degrees of the scale, but now they are all in current use on every degree. Furthermore, composers no longer hesitate to alter (viz. to sharp or flat) any note, or any combination of notes, in any chord, a practice which is likewise justifiable by the phenomenon of

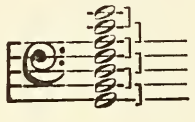
resonance the moment one admits the chord of three notes,

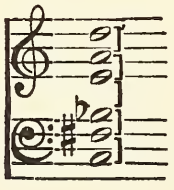
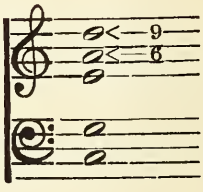


whose combined harmonic series give (enharmonically, viz., with F♯ = G♭, etc.) every note of the chromatic scale.

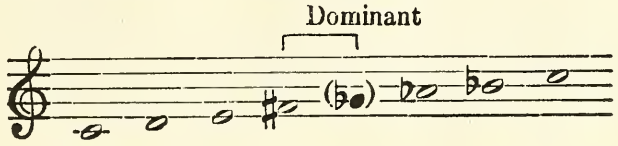
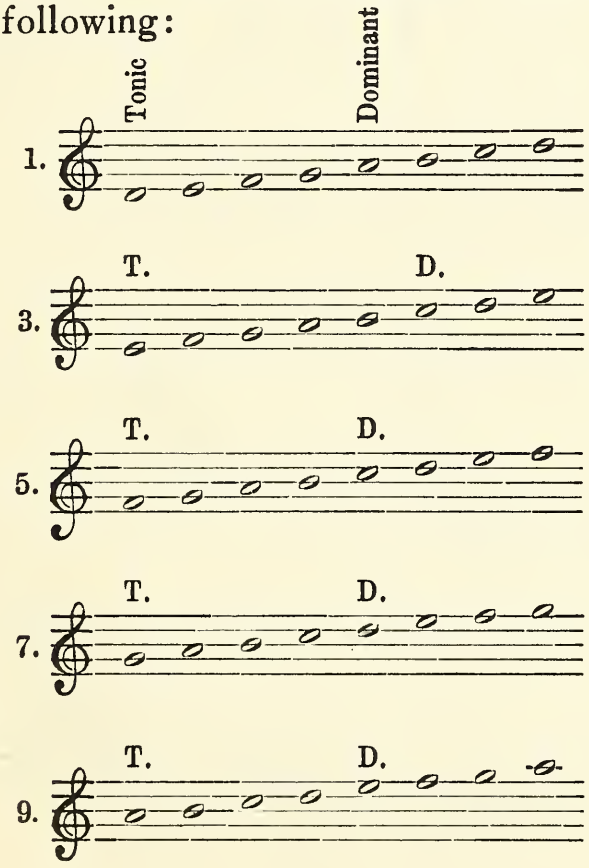
But such *a posteriori* apologies are rather ridiculous and must not be used to prove more than they actually do; namely, that there are no acoustical reasons why any combination of notes should not be used harmonically, that is, as a chord. Whether or not a given chord is beautiful, is another question, of an æsthetic, not a physical, order. The beauty of a chord, or of any other musical element, depends on its context. As Voltaire says, "The real art is in the *à propos*". (*Le grand art est dans l'à propos.*) Certain formulæ of chord progression are quite boresome when they occur in the music of a third-rate composer, but coming from the pen of a Fauré, the same locutions take on, by some miracle, the highest and most moving qualities of beauty. Why that should be we do not know, and do not need to know. It is one of the many mysteries of art which elude all efforts at analysis.

In the preceding table, all the chords are formed by the superposition of thirds,

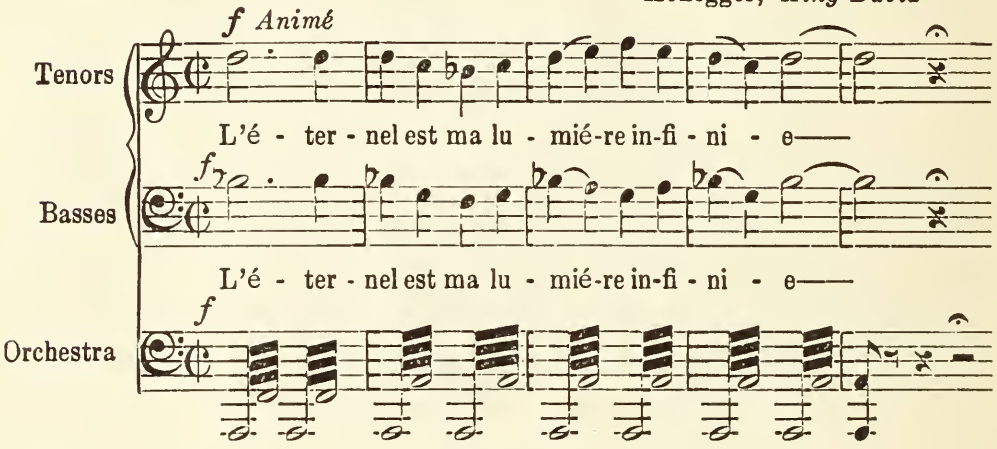


but in modern music we are obliged to recognize other methods of chord construction. Scriabine, for instance, uses (excessively, perhaps) a chord based on the superposition of fourths:

Debussy frequently adds a sixth and a ninth to major triads,

one of the many examples in modern music of so-called "unresolved appoggiaturas", that is, of notes foreign to a

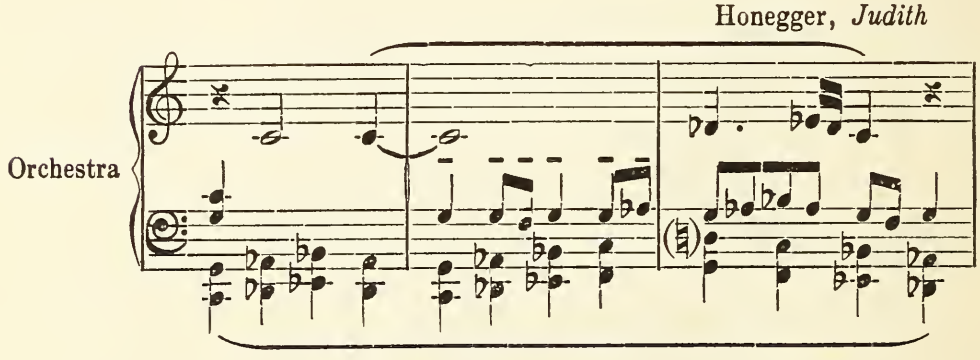
chord, which do not resolve, as in the classics, on to integral notes of the chord. To consider such notes as non-harmonic tones is probably inaccurate, for they have gradually become part and parcel of the chord to which they were grafted. In short, they form new chords whose principles of formation have yet to be deduced and formulated.

More important, however, than the invention of new chords, is the use of other than our usual major, minor, and chromatic scales. Most people know that the whole

tone scale, is of frequent occurrence, for example, in the music of Debussy, but perhaps they are less conscious of the influence on modern harmony of the old church modes (themselves a survival of the antique Greek modes), especially the following:

These modes have, of course, been preserved in the Gregorian Chant, which is still the official music of the Catholic Church, and also in many of the countless European folk songs collected with such enthusiasm during the last forty years. A few examples will suffice to show the reality, if not the extent, of the influence:

FIRST MODE

Honegger, *King David*[1]

THIRD MODE[2]

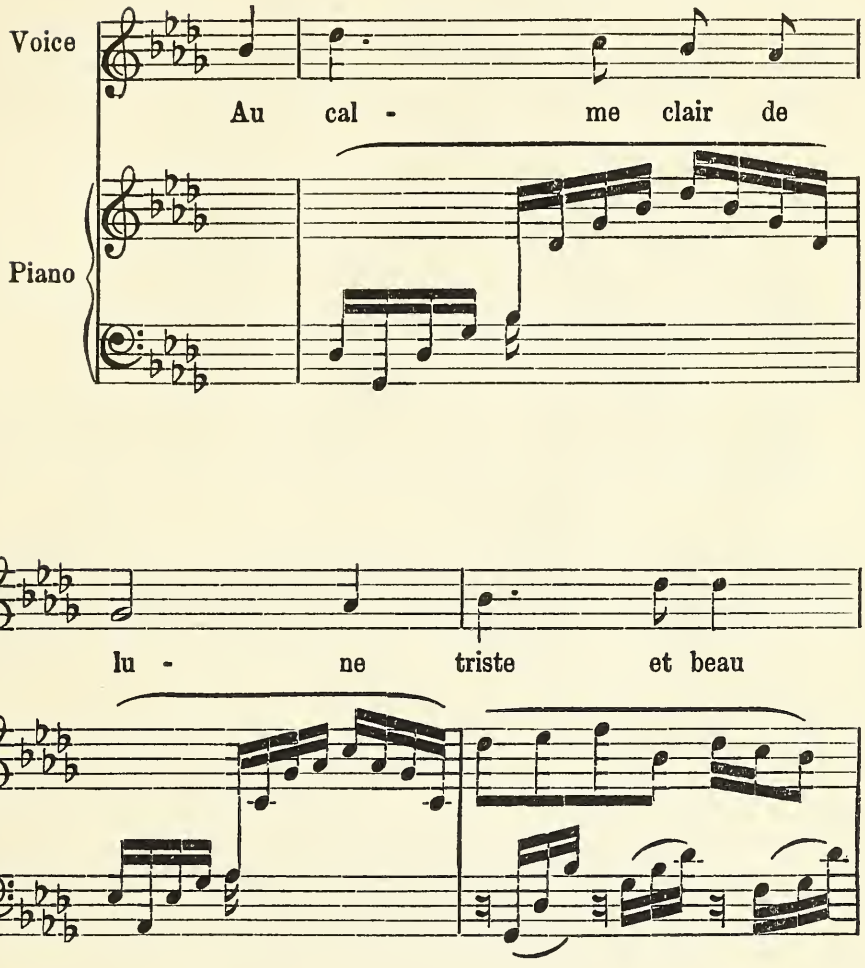
Honegger, *Judith*

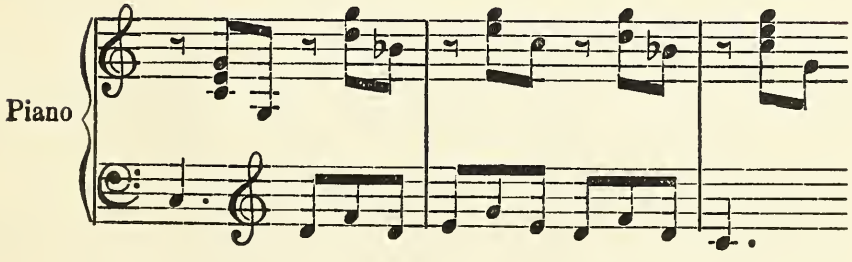


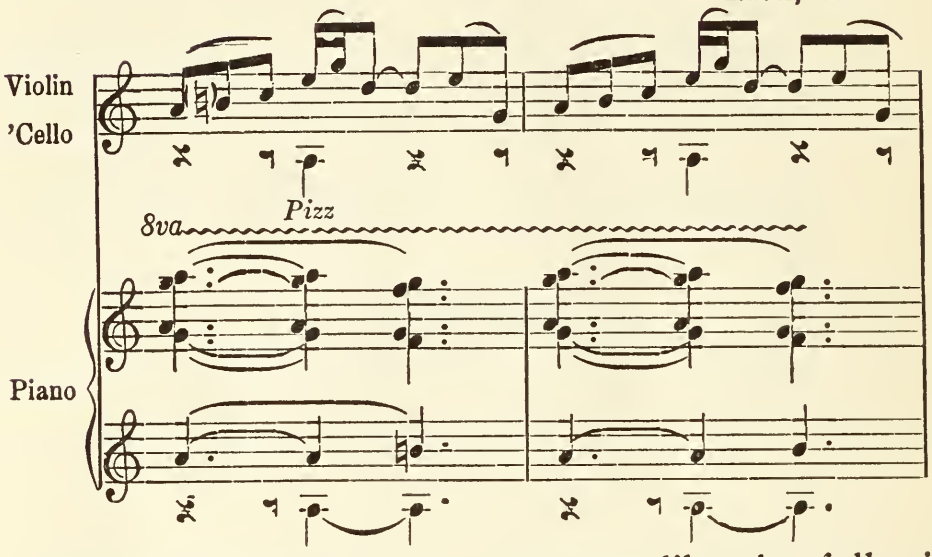
[1] I am indebted to Messrs. Rouart Lerolle, Sénart Hamelle, Fromont, Durand, Heugel, Mathot, Chester, Musique Russe, Bessel and Henn for the liberty of reproducing the examples cited in these Essays.

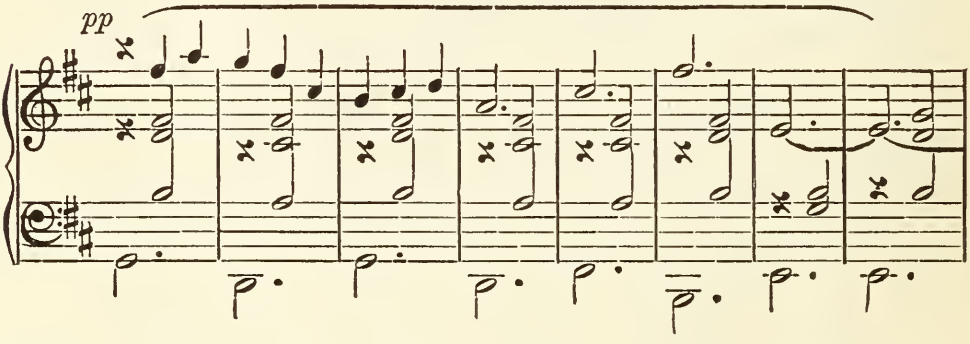
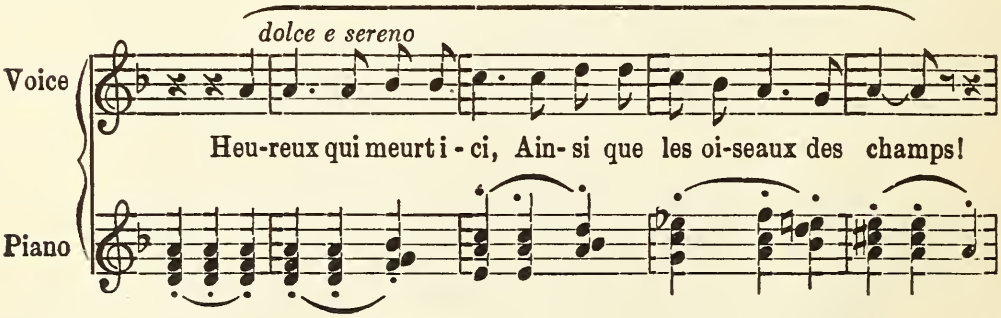
[2] In modern uses of this mode, the dominant is usually changed from the sixth to the fifth degree of the scale.

FIFTH MODE

Fauré, *Clair de Lune*

SEVENTH MODE

Debussy, *Mandoline*

NINTH MODE

Ravel, *Trio*[1]

Equally characteristic are passages like the following, where, though it is not dominated by any single mode and though it contains modern characteristics, the harmony is nevertheless modal in its origins:

Satie, *First Gymnopédie*

Fauré, *At the Cemetery*

[1] The second theme of the first movement. The first theme is in the key of *A* minor with the sixth degree raised. In other words, both themes are based on scales having a common tonic, *A*, contrast being attained not, as in the classics, by a change of *key*, but by a change of *mode*.

Various oriental and defective (five-note) scales are likewise to be found in modern music and we shall have occasion to refer to them specifically in our discussion of the works of Roussel and Debussy.[1]

Recent composers, notably, Debussy, Schmitt, Roussel and Ravel, have devoted considerable attention to rhythmical problems, and their compositions contain many significant innovations in this domain. But to avoid repetition, it will be better to leave detailed discussion of this aspect of modern music for our lecture on Stravinsky.

I am sorry to have remained so long on purely technical ground. My only justification for so doing is that the main difficulty which modern music presents, not only to the layman but to the trained musician as well, is the difficulty inherent in the technical structure of its language. When once the language has been mastered, the "problem" of modern music becomes non-existent. It is impossible therefore to have too much technical knowledge. On the contrary, one never has enough.

Before passing on to our study of individual composers, may I say that it is only with regret and because they are naturally excluded by the limits of my subject, that I refrain from giving prolonged attention to the works of various Italian, Russian, German and other European composers. France has always been quick to recognize beauty and merit wherever they happened to be found[2] and I feel almost as though I were being unfaithful to the traditions of my country in not speaking of such men as de Falla, Malipiero, Szymanowski, Bartok, Schoenberg, etc. Their work is of

[1] For a detailed account of the characteristics and evolution of modern harmony, see Charles Koechlin's masterly essays in Lavignac's *Encyclopédie de la Musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire,* 2° partie Vol. I; also Casella's admirable book on *The Evolution of Music.*

[2] In fact, she has sometimes been even too generous in this respect and has frequently recognized foreign merit before, and at the expense, of native achievements.

first-rate significance and I am sorry that we can give it only passing mention instead of the detailed study which it deserves.

Fauré, Debussy and Stravinsky [1] are, of course, the chief figures in the musical history of the last thirty-five years. The work of Debussy and Stravinsky is known, if it is not always understood, the world over; but Fauré, who is perhaps the greatest of the three, is still practically unknown outside of France.

The simple facts of his life are quickly told. He was born in Pamiers (Ariège) on May 13, 1845, and educated in Paris at the École Niedermeyer. This last detail is of some importance because of the emphasis which that institution laid on training in the church modes and Gregorian Chant and because of the rather special manner in which it taught harmony, a manner which favored the use of altered chords and consequently encouraged those subtle allusions to remote keys that are so characteristic of Fauré's music. "Another main feature in the organization of the school", as Fauré himself said, "was that . . . instruction in the humanities was given hand in hand with the musical training and, . . . being run on the dormitory system of a boarding school, there was less scattering and dispersion of one's time and forces, less of that counsel coming from left and right, which is generally as fatal as it is contradictory, and finally, simply from the standpoint of music, there were fewer pernicious contacts".

His course of study completed, Fauré began his career as an organist, first in Rennes, later in Paris, at various churches, and finally at the Église de la Madeleine. In 1896 he was appointed professor of composition at the

[1] These last two composers have been left for separate study in the succeeding lectures.

Paris Conservatoire, and nine years later became its director, a position which he held until 1920. Distinction followed distinction: he was elected to the Institute (1909) and given the grade of Commander of the Legion of Honor (1910)[1]. Several years later, the entire nation in the persons of the President of the Republic, the Premier and members of the cabinet, did him national homage during a special celebration held in his honor at the Sorbonne, a distinction that has been conferred on only one other person —Pasteur. Fauré died November 3, 1924, and was buried with all the pomp and splendor suggested by the phrase "funérailles nationales".

The man himself was extraordinary in his utter normality and simplicity, his unaffected goodness and kindliness of spirit. As Vuillermoz has said, "No artist has ever been more intensely, more profoundly loved. Great geniuses of the past have been given more solemn tributes of admiration, have called forth more demonstrative enthusiasm; they have acted with more intensity on the crowd and known a more universal and noisy fame; but none of them, in departing, have made hearts grieve more painfully". It was impossible to know Fauré without loving him. The greater his renown, the more unconscious did he become of his own glory. As some one has said, "The man was so perfectly simple, that he seemed not to understand what people meant when they spoke of his simplicity". During his long years of professorship at the Conservatoire, never, in any class, did he let fall one word about himself or his work. The testimony of his pupils in this respect is unanimous. Had they not become acquainted with his music through the natural channels of the concert hall and the

[1] He was later promoted to the highest rank which the Legion of Honor offers.

publishing house, they would never have known that Fauré, the teacher, was Fauré, the composer.

The atmosphere of his classroom, as I can testify from personal experience, was one of sanity and freedom, quite exempt from dogmatism and that narrow spirit of sect and school which we associate with even the best of educational institutions. As a teacher, he seemed to have but one principle: to understand his pupils, to adapt himself to their individual personalities and help them to find their own particular road to artistic self-realization. Distinguished musicians of opposing temperament and talents—Ravel, Schmitt, Roger-Ducasse, Aubert, Enesco, Koechlin, etc.—lived in the shadow of his personality without ever feeling the slightest sense of constraint. It was he who understood them and not they who had to understand him.

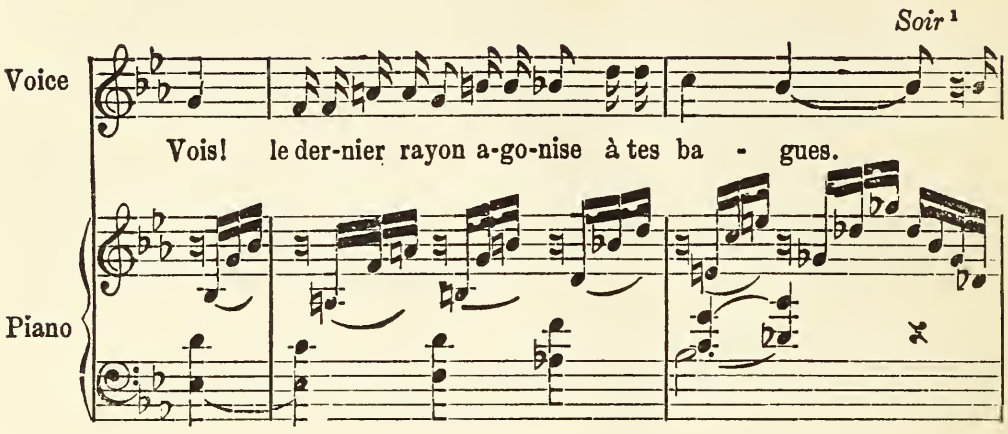
Like Mozart, Fauré is essentially a "musician's composer". The unique concentration of his style, his refinement and his grace are of the sort that sum up centuries of previous culture and development, which can be loved by any sensitive spirit, but which only the trained musician can perhaps fully appreciate. For a foreigner the problem is perhaps even more difficult, for Fauré's music, like the dramas of Racine, is essentially French. Before its deceptive elegance, an Anglo-Saxon or a German sometimes feels those movements of impatience and irritation which the music of Brahms or Malher tends to provoke in a Frenchman.

But in all such cases of national differences, longer acquaintance is an easy and a certain remedy, and in the end one finds oneself loving the very qualities which at first seemed so repellent. Also we must remember that, as Gide has said, "it is in being the most individual that one is the most universal".

The simplicity of Fauré's music has deceived even his compatriots. For many of them, Fauré is still a mere "charming musician" and nothing more, for, to be sure, his music, like the music of Mozart again, is the very quintessence of charm. But its charm is the charm of the aristocrat; it is the cloak of discretion and restraint that go with gentle manners and high breeding. For Fauré, in spite of his humble origins—his father was an inspector of primary schools in the provinces—is a patrician. His smiling suavity disdains all violence of mood or gesture and shuns the solemn effects of oratory and eloquence. He is never agressive, but conceals his strength beneath the quiet force of the unemphatic voice and the untroubled serenity of a soul that has found inner peace and certitude.

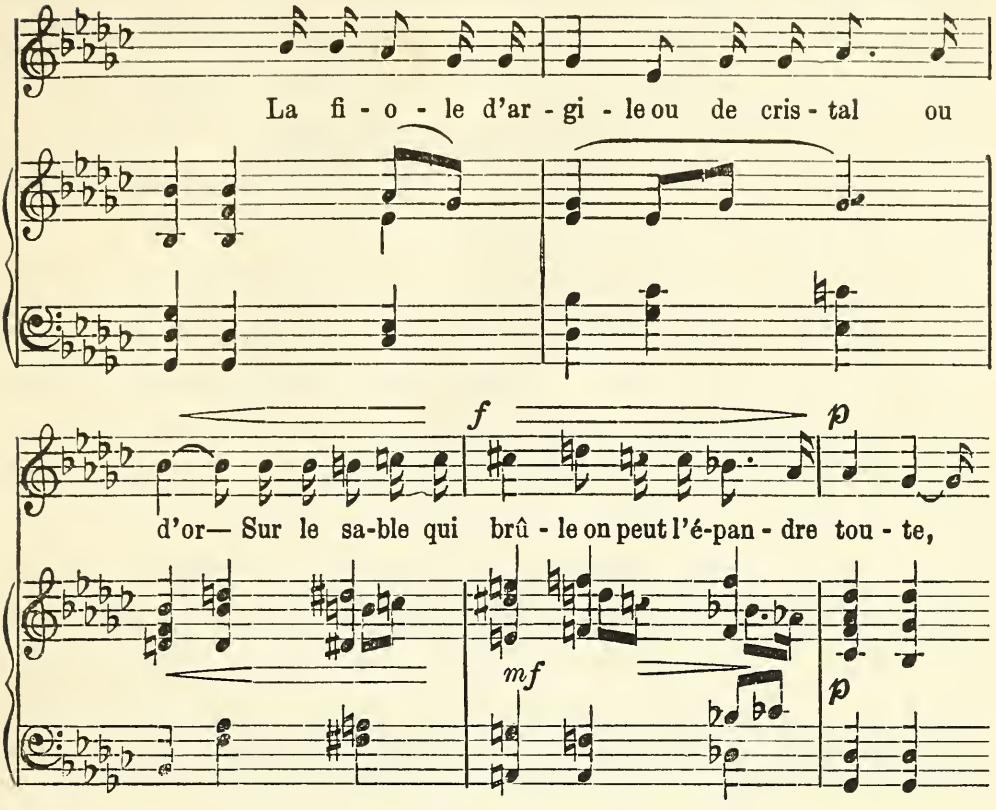
The technical characteristics of his music? They are difficult to discover and, because of their utter naturalness, embarrassing to state. The tonality, chords, rhythms and forms which Fauré uses are the same as they were when he first began to serve music, but, in his hands, these ordinary elements have become precious. Insensibly, year by year and work by work, he made them so perfectly his own that, old when he was young, they were still young when he was old. Even now, when he is dead and gone, they have lost no whit of their freshness, of their perennial charm.

Fauré has been called "the most suave of revolutionaries", and the epithet is just and merited. The syntax of modern harmony owes more to his music than we as yet realize. His vocabulary, to be sure, is the vocabulary of every one, the vocabulary of the classics: triads, seventh chords and an occasional ninth; but in his work these routine harmonies follow each other in a manner so distinctive, so ineffably personal, that they seem quite new, entirely original. The extraordinary ease and freedom which charac-

terize, as in the following measures, his use of seventh chords,

prepared the way for countless later liberties in Ravel and Debussy and clearly foreshadow the latter composer's manner of connecting chords of the ninth.

But, needless to say, in spite of some such minor technical resemblances, the harmony of Fauré and the harmony of Debussy are radically different. Harmony, for Fauré, is an element of design, whereas Debussy tends to conceive it rather as a source of color. Fauré etches in even the most subtle of his modulations with the sharp, fine lines of a pen. You never know to what key he is leading you, but when you reach your tonal destination, there is never any doubt as to its location. Indeed, you feel almost as though it would have been impossible to have gone elsewhere and you wonder only at the beauty of the voyage and at the skill of your guide who, in coming, has led you so quickly and surely through so many lands. The subtlety of Fauré's transitory modulations, the ease and naturalness with which he alludes to the most remote keys, are the mind's sheerest delight. Take, for example, a passage like the following:

[1] This particular song, it is true, is a late work and dates from 1900, but the same characteristics of harmonic progression are to be found in germ (but for that reason, none the less unmistakably) in the early compositions.

La Parfum Impérissable

One knows not what to admire most in such harmony: the richness and accuracy of its allusions to foreign keys or the deftness with which it returns to the point from which it started.

As the above citations show, Fauré, like Wagner, is one of the few composers who conceive tonality as a mobile and not a static state. Yet there is no direct filiation between the two men. One of the most extraordinary aspects of Fauré's music and one that says much for the power and independence which lurk beneath the charm of his personality, is that never can one say that such or such a piece was written under the influence of such and such a composer. Yet Fauré witnessed the rise and decline of reputations like Wagner, Frank, Strauss, Debussy, and lived to see the beginning of Stravinsky's fame. He took an active and

sympathetic interest in their music but never was in the slightest danger of losing his artistic equilibrium, his natural independence of style. Strange as it may seem, he owes most to Gounod and Bach,[1] to the delicacy and suavity of the one and to the other's incomparable sense of self-unfolding melody.

Consider, for instance, the *Allegro Moderato* of the "Second Quintet". In reality, the entire movement represents a single, long line. Cadences there are, many plagal, two or three perfect, most of them deceptive; but very few of them, until the last pages of the coda, have the punctuative value of a period. Most of them are commas or at best, semicolons. Consequently, first, transition and secondary themes, development, recapitulation, and coda constitute not so many sections of a sonata form, but a single, uninterrupted melody which grows and unfolds with miraculous fecundity and naturalness. The resulting impression of freshness and youth is incredible, coming, as it does, from the pen of an old man of seventy-six.

Ordinarily, it is sad to grow old, but not so with Fauré. To age, for him, meant a quiet process of selection, the gradual liberation of his spirit, which, by a long and joyfully accepted discipline, had eliminated all that was useless and ephemeral and freed itself of "every earthborn care". One feels that he regarded death in much the same way as Bach regarded it, as a natural goal and not a danger, as a state to be desired rather than feared. Here the great Protestant cantor and Fauré, the Catholic, have "ascended to meet". Works, for instance, like Bach's Choral Prelude for Organ, "O Man, Bewail thy Grievous Sin", and Fauré's "Requiem",[2] are both inspired by a similar, mys-

[1] Saint-Saëns, his teacher and life-long friend, must also have initiated him into some of the secrets of logical and lucid form.

[2] Cf. also "O mort, poussière d'étoiles".

tical view of religion and death, a view so high and serene that, in its presence, differences of creed and dogma fade into insignificance.

The Church can absolve and sustain, but also judge and condemn us. Unlike Bach, Fauré has never given expression to this latter and menacing aspect of his faith. Religion, he understands more in the manner of the Gospel according to St. John, in the manner of Saint Francis and Fra Angelico, than of Bossuet or Saint Bernard. He finds in it a source of love, not of fear. If, as in the "Requiem", he sings of the grief which death inspires, it is a grief so near to God as to be wholly free from vain revolt or lamentation. What dominates the quite impersonal tenderness of the music, is the sense of certain pardon, the serene expectation of eternal rest.

This note of certainty, of inner peace, is never absent from his work and explains, in part, at least, the man's deep and abiding joy in life. Every note he wrote—even of the works which chant the soul's nostalgia for the other world—attests his love of life, his love of loving it and the keen delight he felt at the mere perception that an object was lovely or a line beautiful. In this and other respects, he is Greek rather than Christian. He has the Greek's sense of measure and sobriety. Like Plato, he feels a sort of ecstasy before the austere though sensuous beauty of form or line. Take "Danseuse" (*The Dancer*) the last song in "Mirages"; its cool, detached beauty suggests the chaste contours, the sharp and clear designs of a Greek vase. One is reminded of Valéry's phrase, "I look upon this woman who is walking and yet who gives me a sense of immobility". (*Je contemple cette femme qui marche et qui me donne le sentiment de l'immobilité.*)

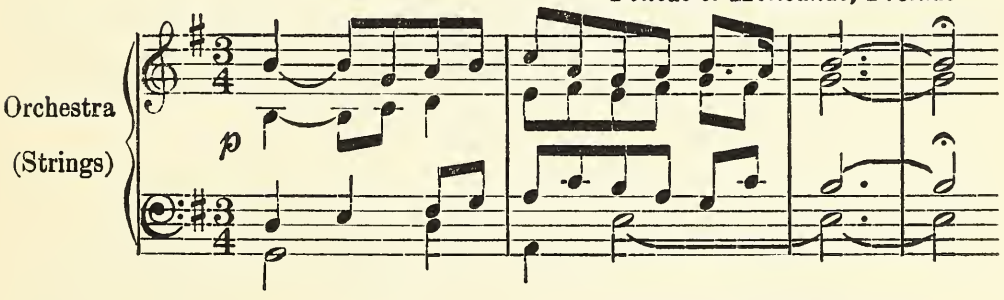
Fauré is indeed an "Attic musician", and one might very well think that these lines from "Eupalinos",[1] which describe with such penetrating subtlety the spirit of Greek architecture, were intended rather for the composer of "Pénélope"—so vividly do they suggest his idea of modulation, his sense of balance and proportion: "Like those orators and poets of whom you were thinking a moment ago, he [the architect] knew, O Socrates, the virtue of imperceptible modulations. Before his delicately lightened masses, in appearance, so simple, no one was conscious of the fact that, by these insensible curves, these minute but all powerful inflexions and by these profound combinations of the regular and irregular which had been introduced, hidden and rendered as imperious as they were indefinable, he was being led to a sort of happiness. They made the moving spectator docile to their invisible presence, caused him to pass from vision to vision, from absolute silence to murmurs of pleasure in proportion as he advanced, retreated, or approached again to wander, moved by its beauty, and the puppet of admiration, within the radius of the building. It is necessary, said this man of Megara, that my temple move men as they are moved by the objects of their love".

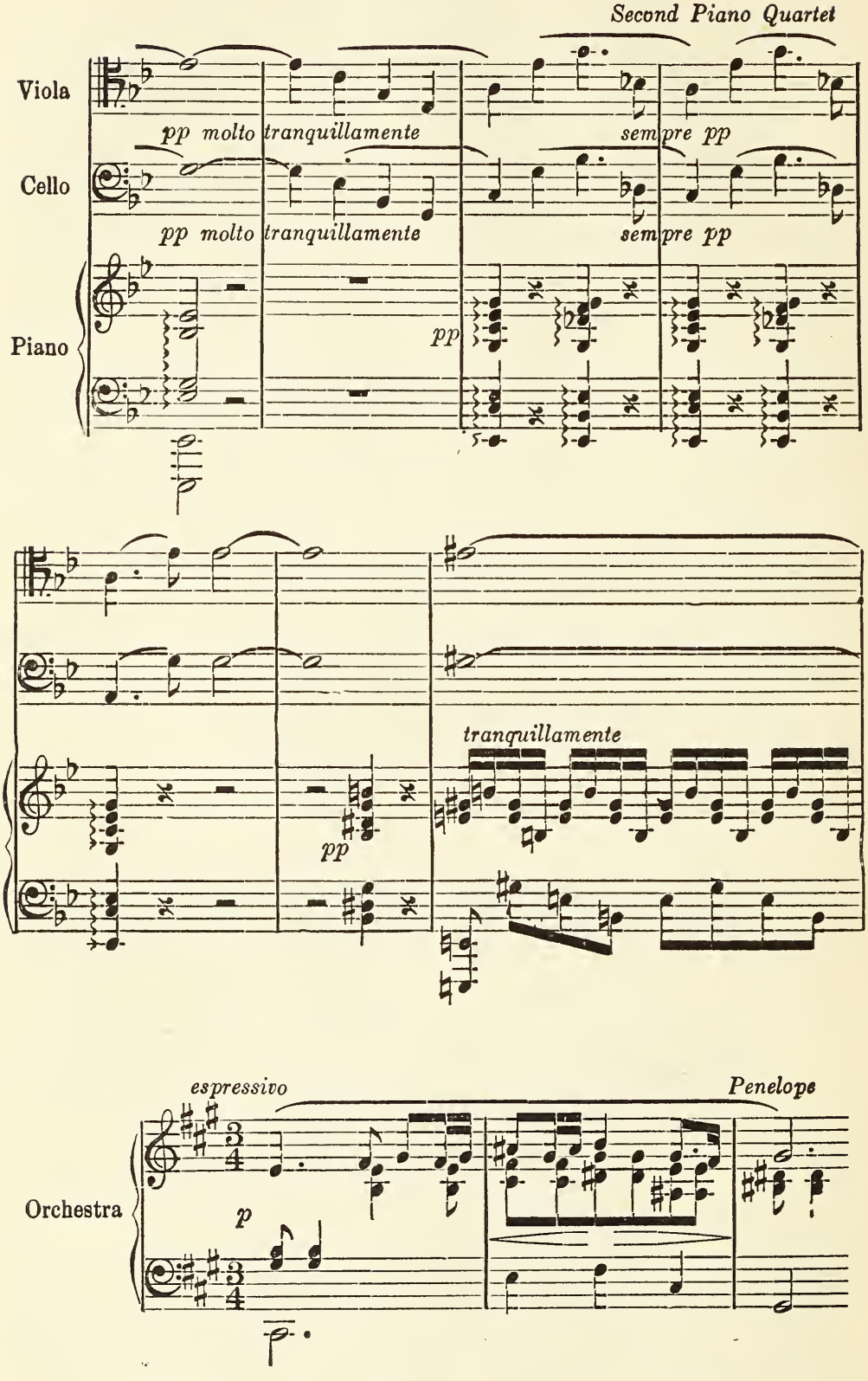
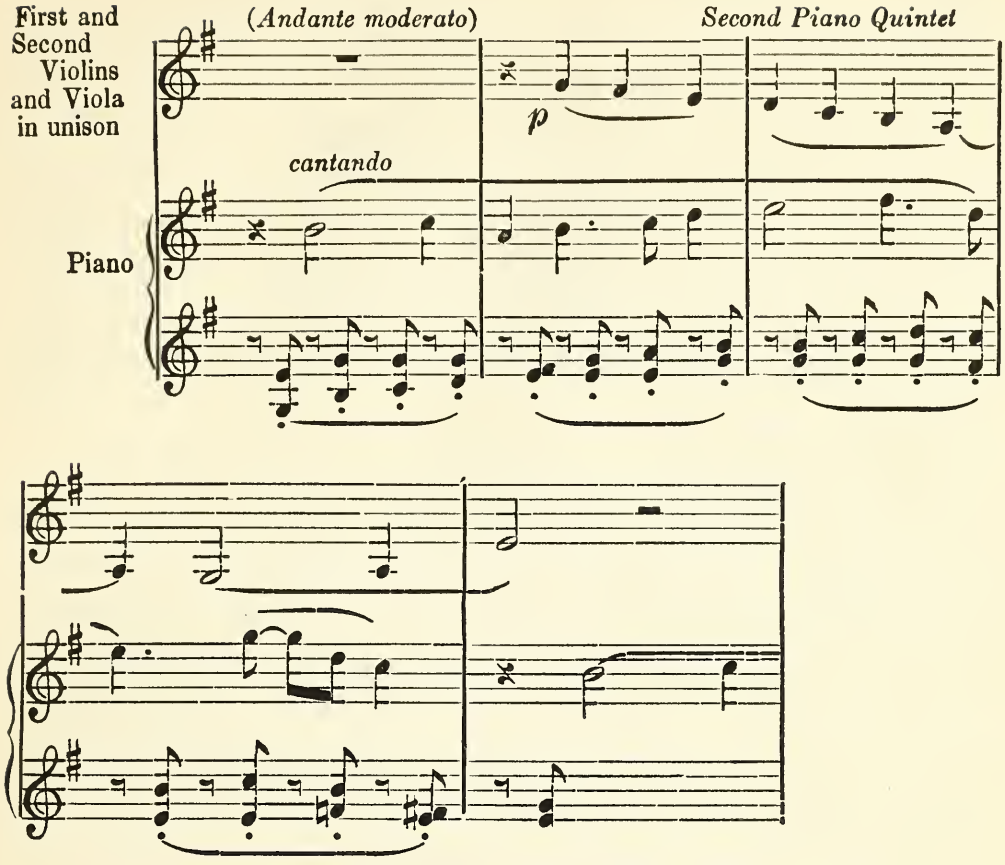
We have scarcely touched on the music itself. I would have preferred to play it rather than write about it, or, since that is impossible, to quote whole pages of Fauré's works. But lack of space forbids and I must content myself with enumerating—in an order which may facilitate making his acquaintance—the most characteristic of his compositions: "Les Berceaux" (*The Cradles*),[2] "Aurore"

[1] Likewise by Valéry.
[2] In second volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.

(*Dawn*),[1] "Les Roses d'Ispahan" (*The Roses of Ispahan*),[1] "Claire de Lune" (*Moonlight*),[1] "Au Cimetière" (*At the Cemetery*),[2] "Prison", "Soir" (*Evening*),[2] "La Bonne Chanson"[3] "Pelléas et Mélisande" (orchestral suite)[3] "Elégie" (Cello and piano),[3] Sixth,[3] Seventh[3] and Ninth[5] "Nocturnes" (for piano), Fifth "Barcarolle" (piano), "Second Piano Quartet",[3] "Thèmes et Variations",[3] (piano) "Requiem",[3] "La Chanson d'Eve" (*Eve's Song*),[5] "Le Parfum Impérissable" (*The Undying Fragrance*),[2] "First Cello Sonata",[4] "Second Piano Quintet",[4] "Penelope",[7] "L'Horizon Chimérique" (*The Chimerical Horizon,* songs),[4] *"Mirages",* (songs),[4] "Second Violin Sonata",[4] "First Piano Quintet",[6] "Thirteenth Nocturne" (piano),[4] and the "String Quartet".[4]

In conclusion, may I cite a few of the shorter phrases or themes. Their beauty speaks so eloquently as to make all comment superfluous and, after all, citation is the only satisfactory manner of writing about music.

Pelléas et Mélisande, Prélude

[1] In the second volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.
[2] In third volume of his "Mélodies", published by Hamelle, Paris.
[3] Published by Hamelle, Paris.
[4] Published by Durand et Cie, Paris.
[5] Published by Heugel, Paris.
[6] Published by Schirmer, New York.
[7] Fauré's only opera; a masterpiece which a poor libretto and inadequate orchestration may banish from the stage. It is published by Hamelle.


Second Piano Quartet
Viola
Cello
Piano
pp molto tranquillamente
sempre pp
pp molto tranquillamente
sempre pp
pp
tranquillamente
pp
espressivo
Penelope
Orchestra
p

Of all his disciples, Roger-Ducasse is the one who was and still remains closest to the spirit of Fauré.

His work is full of emotion, but, at times, one must seek to find it, for it is concealed beneath the somewhat objective brilliance and richness of his style and is held well in control by a mind of unusual power that takes especial delight in clarity of form and solidity of musical construction. One is tempted to apply to him Maurras's sentence about the Greeks: "Feeling pervaded and troubled their conduct, but it was reason which they placed on their altars". (*Le sentiment agitait toute leur conduite, et c'est la raison qu'ils mirent sur leur autel.*)

The "Sarabande", one of the most moving works written in the period we are studying, the "Piano Quartet", the "Pastorale for Organ" and the "Spring Nocturne" for

orchestra—to mention only a few titles—are full of tenderness and are manifestly the product of a deep, strong personality. He who would become acquainted, from a different angle, with its force and its charm, has only to read the article [1] which Roger-Ducasse wrote on the chamber music of Fauré, for it gives many an illuminating insight into the quality and penetration of his mind and into the beauty of the relationship which bound him in lifelong affection to his "master".

We turn now to Ravel and Schmitt.

Maurice Ravel, born 1875, because of the almost miraculous perfection of his technique, has been called the "Swiss watchmaker" of modern music. He is the perfect example of the "maître", in the sense that conception and execution seem to represent for him but a single creative process. He can do what he likes. Whatever task he sets himself—whether it be to write a virtuoso work, like "La Valse", for full orchestra, an unaccompanied "Sonata for Violin and Cello", or a song like "Ronsard à son âme" (*Ronsard to his Soul*) where a long, tenuous line of open fifths, played by a single hand, suffices to accompany the voice—is accomplished with astonishing ease and mastery. His command over the manifold resources of the orchestra is prodigious and he moves with facility and evident delight in the most dangerous realms of orchestral virtuosity.

For many people, Ravel is still a lesser Debussy, a mere shadow of the great impressionist. The mistake is understandable but quite unjust to Ravel. There are, to be sure, obvious points of contact between the two men: their mutual repudiation of romantic "eloquence", their veneration for Rameau and Couperin, a common inclination to exoticism and certain similarities of harmonic technique and

[1] In the 1922, October number of the *Revue Musicale.*

of piano and orchestral writing. But, nevertheless, the styles of the two composers remain distinct and, what is more important, their personalities differ profoundly.

In spite of the modern character of his style, and in spite of his many works in the impressionistic manner [1] (e.g. "Jeux d'Eau", *Fountains;* "Gaspard de la Nuit", *Gaspard of the Night;* "Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé", etc.), Ravel's deepest affiliations are with the eighteenth century. He has its love of sharp outlines, of concise and lucid form, no little of its ironic wit and humor (e.g. the "Histoires Naturelles", *Stories from Nature;* and "L'Heure Espagnole", *The Spanish Hour*) and his music, like that of the clavecinists, springs from the dance,[2] incarnates its spirit of vivacious movement, its "ever new and delightful pleasure in a useless occupation".

The quotation, which serves as motto to the "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales", suggests another eighteenth-century aspect of Ravel's art, namely, its exquisite delight in the world of elves and fairies. The fantastic and chimerical have always fascinated artists and probably always will, for they are part of the eternal romanticism of the human spirit. The trait itself, therefore, is not characteristic of any one epoch. Nevertheless, one feels that Ravel's appreciation of the fantastic is more akin to the spirit of Perrault's "Fairy Tales" than it is, say, to Hugo's "Djinns" or to the sumptuous and exotic color of "The Golden Cock". Fairies, for Ravel, are the pretext for a fine and aimless vagabondage of the mind rather than a spur to the curiosity of the sensibility. All his fancies are tinged with a quaint whimsicality, a certain intellectual quality of playfulness

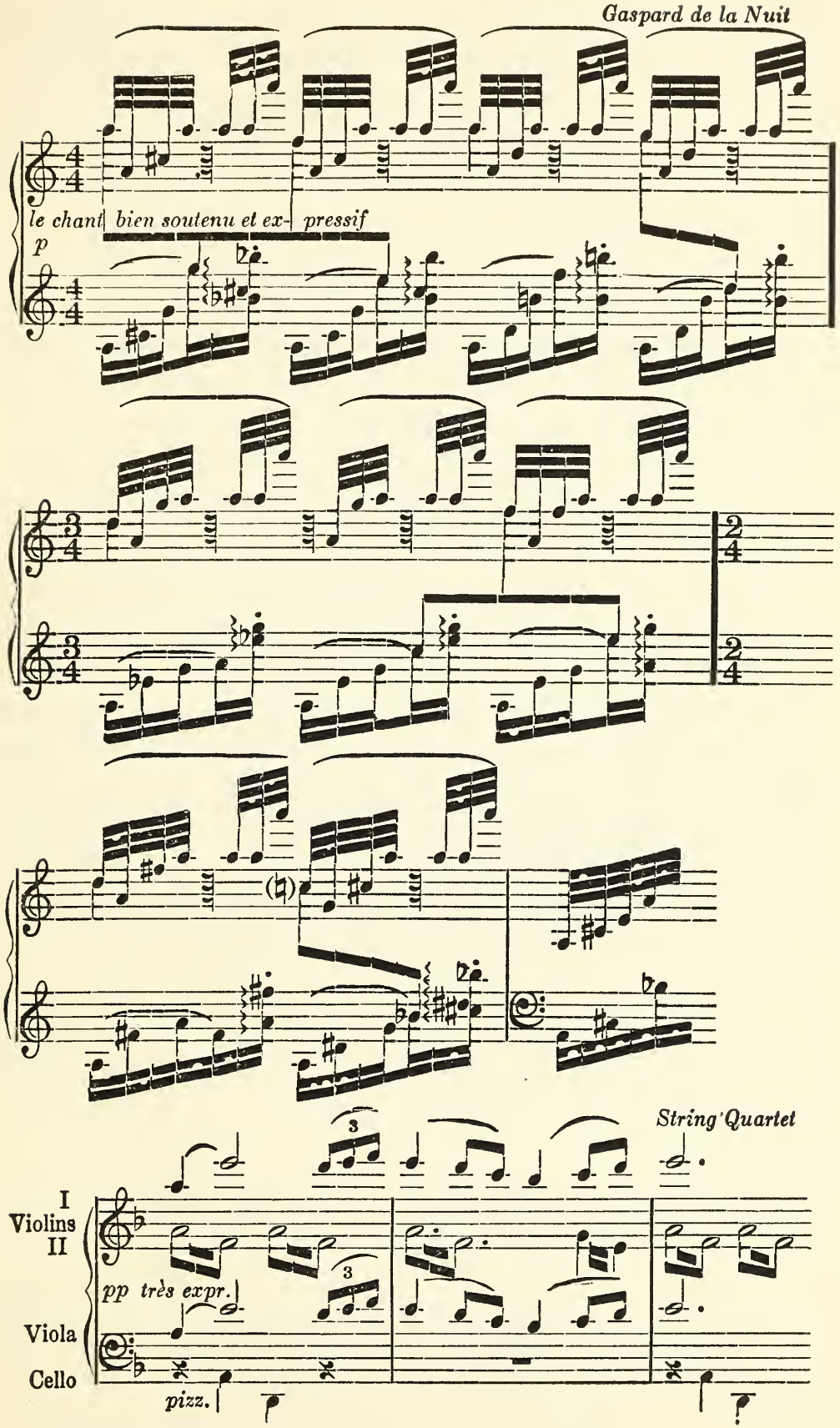
[1] But not the least salient feature of even these works is the clarity of their key-scheme and the precision of their form.

[2] e.g. "Menuet Antique", "Alborada del gracioso", "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales", "Sonatine", "Le Tombeau de Couperin", "Trio", "Rapsodie Espagnole", and "La Valse", etc.

that is given very well by these lines from Madame d'Aulnoy's "Green Serpentine", which appear as sub-title to one of the pieces in the "Mother Goose Suite" and which are dedicated to "Little Miss Ugly, Empress of the Pagodas":[1] "She undressed and entered her bath. Immediately little idols began to sing and play. Some had theorbos made of nutshells, others, viols, made from the husks of almonds—for it was necessary to proportion the instruments to the size of the performers".

Finally, Ravel belongs to the eighteenth century by virtue of his reticence. As Roland-Manuel, the composer's gifted disciple and friend, has said: "It is not necessary to know Maurice Ravel personally nor to have penetrated very far into the essentials of his thought to convince oneself that the methods of this musician, his technique and, indeed, his entire art imply a process of voluntary research and the distrust of inspiration. . . . If his music pleases, moves you, or calls forth your tears, know that it was composed by a man who dropped to his knees neither 'before nor after', who did not weep in writing it and who, like a certain great poet, thinks that 'he who would write his dream, owes it to himself to be infinitely alert and awake' ".

Not that Ravel's music is without life or feeling. On the contrary, phrases like the following:

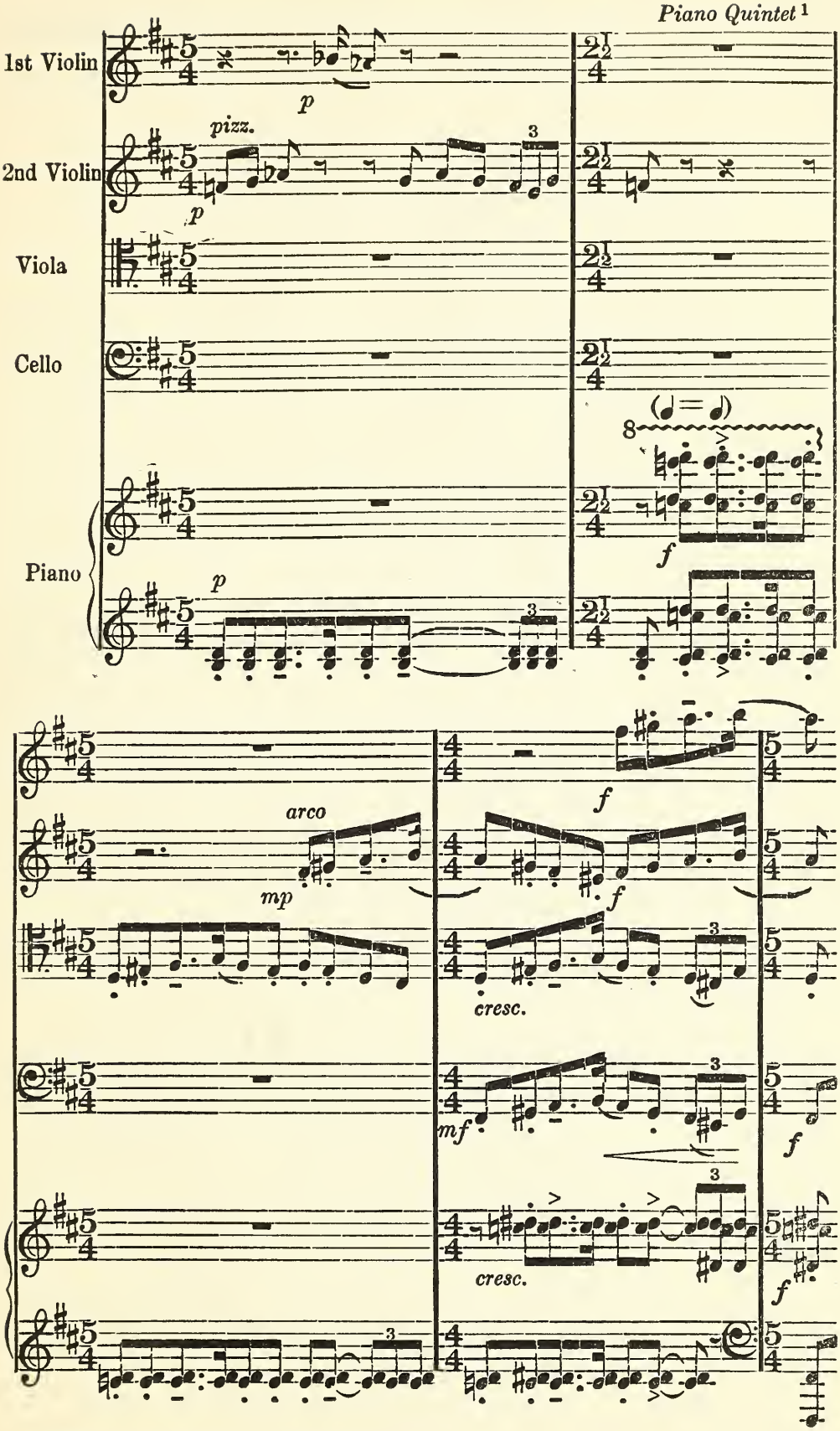
[1] "Laideronette, Impératrice des Pagodes."

Gaspard de la Nuit
le chant bien soutenu et ex- pressif
p
String Quartet
I
Violins
II
pp très expr.
Viola
Cello
pizz.

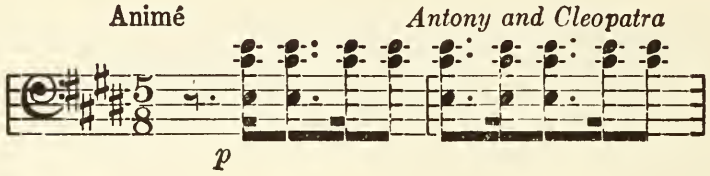
and many others, are as suave and chaste in their lyricism as the purest melodies of the classics. But on the whole, however, Ravel tends to be objective and the beauty of his music, disdaining the facile confidences of romantic art, resides in the style itself rather than in any qualities of "expressiveness".

Florent Schmitt was born in Lorraine (1870) and his music shows clearly the traces of his double Latin and Teutonic heredity. Clarity and balance of form, sensuous harmonies, acute sensitiveness in matters of sonority, in short, traits which we usually think of as being more or less Gallic, alternate or unite with the more Germanic ideals of ponderous force, of imposing construction and of abundance and depth of feeling.

Being of fiery and impetuous temperament, Schmitt naturally revels in the world of rhythm and many are the contributions which he has made to this aspect of modern music. As early as 1908, to take but a single example, we find him, in the last movement of the *Piano Quintet,* wielding a type of metre, based on unequal measures, that was later to become a marked feature of Stravinsky's style.[1]

[1] Schmitt, however, cannot be said to have "influenced" Stravinsky.

Piano Quintet[1]

[1] Notice the measure of 2½ beats.

He delights and particularly excels in rhythms of nervous force and movement which, like the following,

become positively sinister by virtue of their insistence and whose violence and abandon often, as in "Orgies",[1] rise to the point of frenzy.

There is something titanic about the man. Not only his rhythms, but his themes, so long in line and so lavish of emotional intensity, his luxuriant harmonies, the extraordinary opulence of his counterpoint and last, but not least, the barbaric splendor and color of his orchestra all point to a personality of more richness and power than is usually granted even to men of genius. Instinctively, therefore, Schmitt turns for expression to the grandiose, the ponderous and the mighty. He erects those gigantic and monumental constructions like the "Psalm",[2] the "Piano Quintet" and "Antony and Cleopatra", which, coming from a feebler pen, would be "as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals", but which, at his hands, have acquired the overwhelming force and that sense of inevitability which only the very great can achieve.

Yet one feels that, after all, it would be impossible to imprison within the pages of even such scores the tumult and the torment of a soul like Schmitt's. For the man is fundamentally insatiable. He is athirst for the infinite and no matter how far he may push his lust for intensity of feeling, one knows in advance that he will never quite

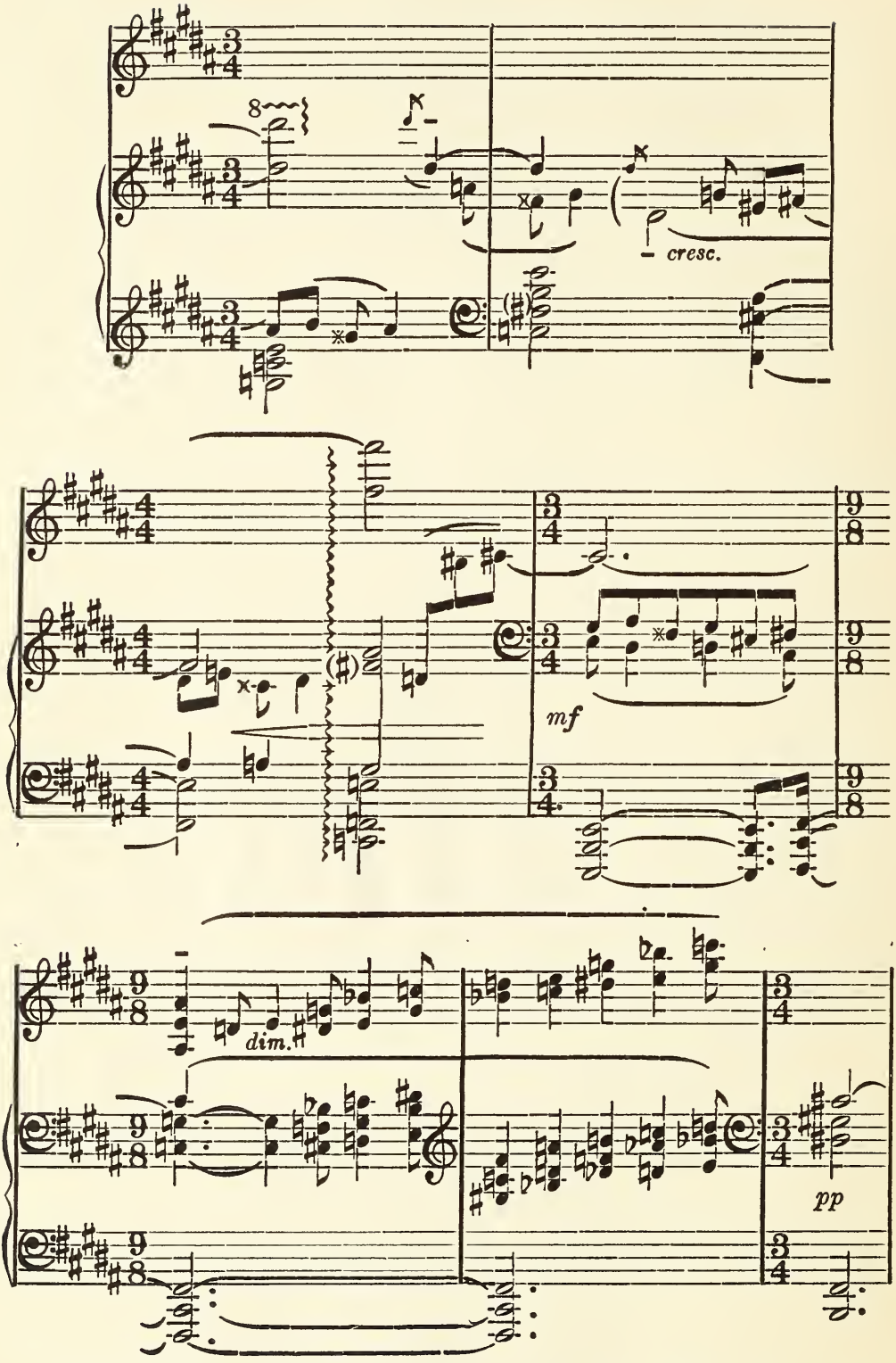
[1] Also from "Antony and Cleopatra": Symphonic preludes and interludes for the drama, after Shakespeare, by André Gide.

[2] For chorus, soprano solo, organ and orchestra.

reach the limit of his desires, that there will always be something more that remains ungiven, unexpressed. And in this abundance of reserve strength lies the chief secret of his power.

In the work of such a temperament, one might expect to find that note of ironic bitterness and disillusion which so often accompanies the sense of human defeat. But with Schmitt's music, such is not the case. To the composer of "The Tragedy of Salomé" has been given the rare privilege of rendering the torture of a soul in exile without ever, in so doing, falling into the snares of a futile and destructive pessimism. The immense suffering and solitude which are the glorious lot of every genius, have been sublimated by Schmitt into a life of impetuous and creative activity: no one, more than he, arouses in us the love and need of living to the full the brief span of our existence. To a generation which (by a reaction that, in its day, was necessary) was given the taste for "precious" trifles and rare sensations, Schmitt's solid and impassioned music offers the opportunity of dwelling, for a moment, in those high, free regions where, if to suffer means to live more intensely, even suffering is a joy. Hence he belongs among the leaders of men, among those who have brought us light and consolation.

A single quotation from "Dreams",[1] to illustrate the richness of Schmitt's style and to justify the plea that his works be given the more frequent hearings and the wider recognition which their greatness merits.

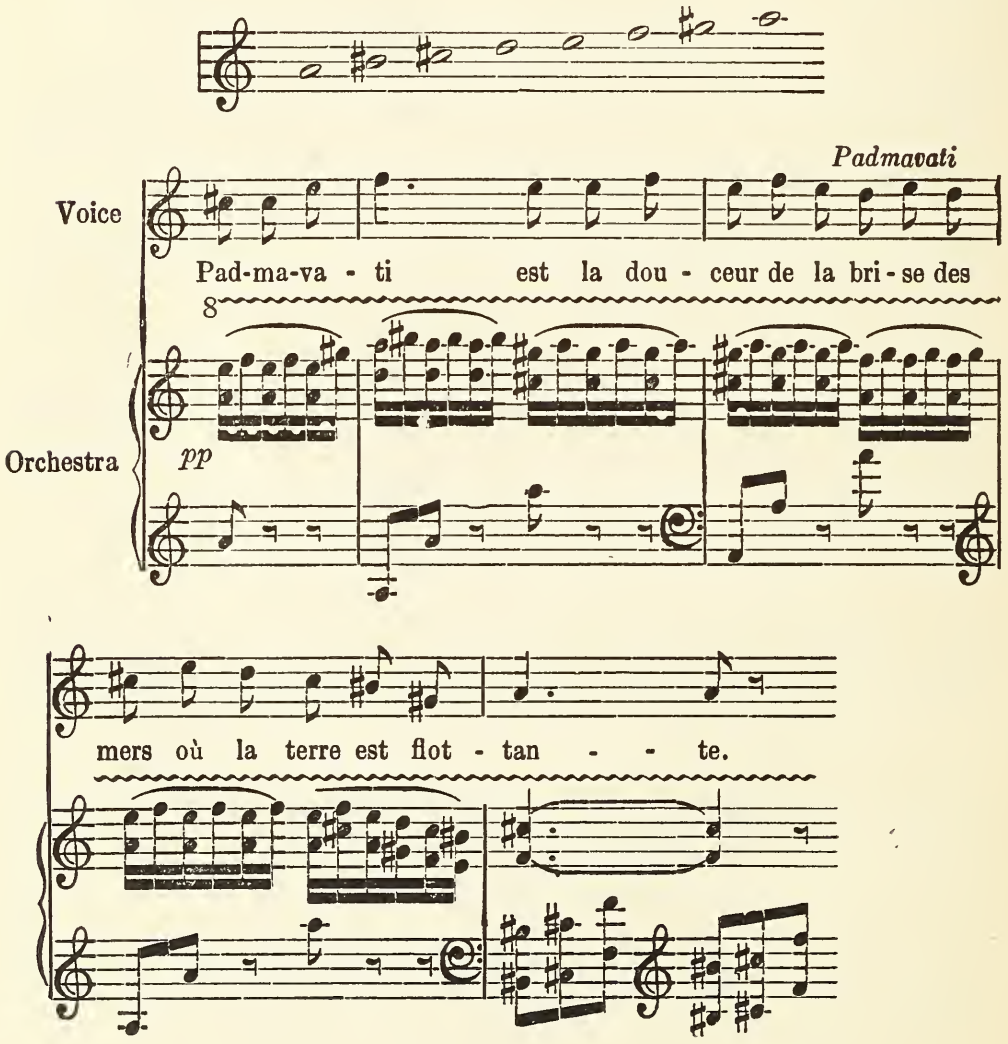
[1] For orchestra.

Albert Roussel, born 1869, took up music as a profession relatively late in life. Only in 1894 did he abandon

his earlier career of a naval officer and come to Paris, at the age of twenty-five, to study harmony, counterpoint, fugue and composition, first with Gigout, and later with d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum. All his works bear, in indefinable manner, the evidence of his late start, of a discipline accepted only after the most supple of his formative years were passed. This circumstance of his education explains, perhaps, a certain awkwardness in his harmony, an awkwardness which has nothing to do with the dissonance or modernity of his idiom and which is far more a source of individuality than it is a handicap.

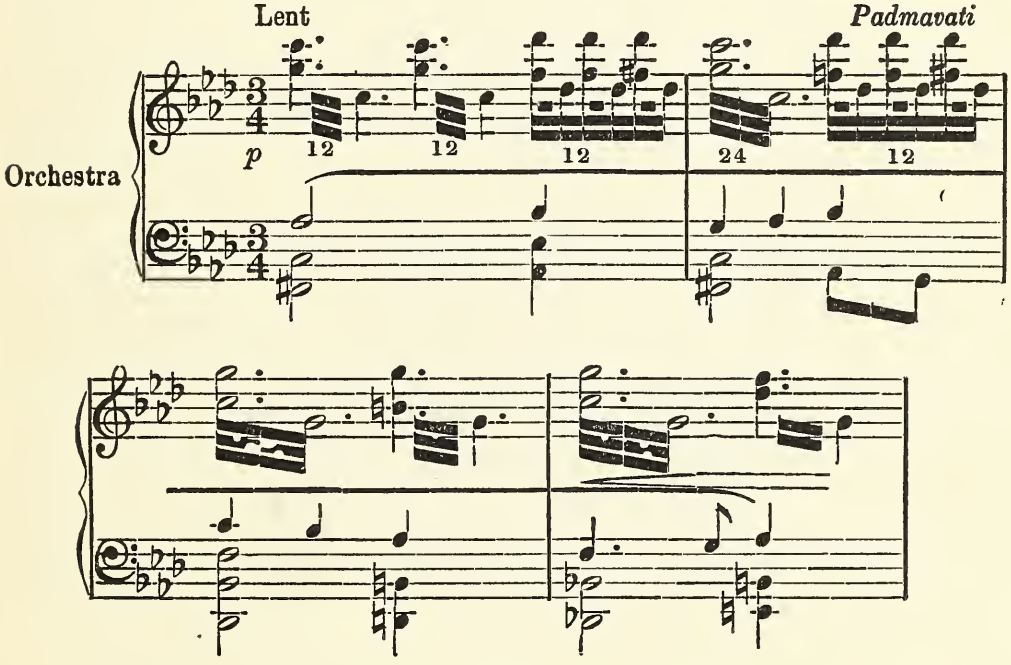
But a personality of Roussel's force needed no external, fortuitous strokes of fortune to develop and fix its natural originality. In all contemporary French music there is no more independent spirit than he and it is exceedingly difficult to trace the influences which assisted in the formation of his language. The "cellular" treatment and "cyclical" form of an early work like the "Trio" op. 2 (1902) are doubtless reminiscent of those severe principles of musical form embodied in d'Indy's monumental "Treatise on Composition".

But the years which Roussel spent in India when he was still an officer of the navy, and his visit to the Orient in 1909-10 were certainly of greater formative significance than the influence of any of his teachers. He is the most exotic of French composers in the sense that his exoticism represents something more than a simple curiosity of a sensibility ever on the alert for new experiences, new sensations. The orientalism of a work like "Padmavati",[1] for instance, is not confined to external touches of local color, to the facile effects of a strange and foreign atmosphere. It penetrates to the depths of the Eastern spirit, is

[1] An "opera-ballet".

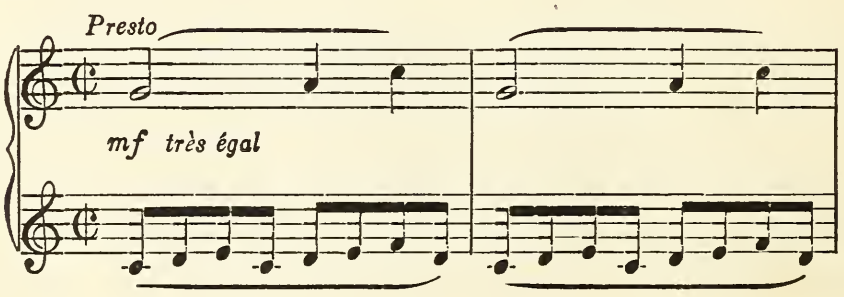
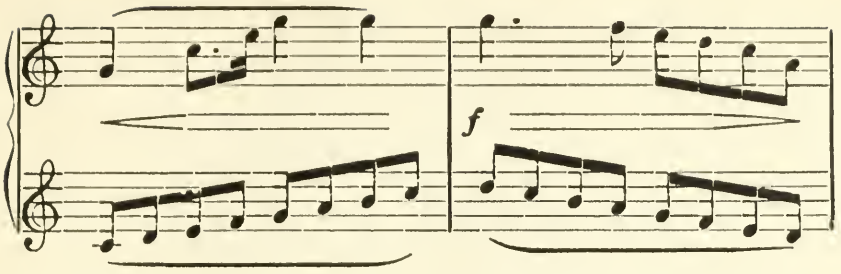
saturated with that sense of fatality, of immobility and non-existence that veils and obscures the savage intensity of oriental instincts and desires. The following phrase, so extraordinary for its feeling of dreamlike volubility, is quite typical of this side of Roussel's temperament and will serve also to illustrate his thoroughly natural use of oriental idioms. Both the melody and the accompaniment of the entire passage, from which I cite only a few bars, is based on the unaltered notes of this scale:

It is not easy to make Roussel's acquaintance, because his language is so essentially orchestral, that piano transcrip-

tions give little idea of its beauty or its power. There is also this difficulty, namely, that modern ears are relatively unaccustomed to listening to music conceived melodically rather than harmonically, and Roussel's idiom, even when it is homophonic, is distinctly "horizontal". To appreciate it, therefore, one must hear it "horizontally", must follow lines rather than chords.

Roussel has yet to receive the recognition and fame that are due him. His fine and delicate ballet, "The Spider's Feast", is fast becoming a modern classic, but his "Evocations",[1] "For a Spring Fête" [1] and "Padmavati", are still, in spite of occasional performances, relatively unknown, even in France. Yet, as these few measures testify,

the man has developed an extraordinarily personal style which cannot be confused with that of any other living composer and one can say, with little risk, that his work promises to hold an increasingly important place in contemporary music.

[1] For orchestra.

Honegger, Poulenc, Milhaud, Auric, Durey and Mademoiselle Tailleferre will probably, merely as a matter of convenience, be known for some time as "The Group of the Six". Yet as far as their æsthetics are concerned, they have little in common except a general tendency toward a more or less objective view of their art, a tendency which is characteristic of most recent music and which Roland-Manuel has in mind when he says that "It is no longer the driver who interests us, but the machine which he has set in motion". (*Ce n'est plus le mécanicien qui nous émeuvra, c'est la machine qu'il aura mise en marche.*)

Following, to some extent, in the footsteps of Eric Satie, —an uneven composer, but not without originality and genius—and even more out of absolute necessity, for it was the only thing to do, these young composers have tried to react against musical impressionism. But each one has reacted in his own way. Milhaud has done interesting experiments in jazz rhythms and polyharmony (viz., the simultaneous use of two or more keys). Auric and Poulenc, especially the latter, have striven for extreme simplicity, have restored to music, as Ravel did more significantly and in other ways, the pleasure of being just music, that is, a succession of agreeable sounds composed without any thought of subjective or dramatic expression. Poulenc's work, as one can see from these few bars of the opening movement in the "Suite for Piano",



is full of charm. It bears unmistakably the stamp of a born musician and has all the exquisite freshness and spontaneity of youth, for the composer is still but a young man. Consequently, it is too early to attempt any judgment as to the ultimate significance of his work, for, to do so, would be to make prophecies about music that is still to be written. But of the reality and worth of Poulenc's gifts, there can be no doubt.

The most important figure in the group is unquestionably Arthur Honegger. Though he was born in Le Havre (1892) and received the greater part of his musical education in France, Honegger is of Swiss origin and a Swiss subject. He has a quite extraordinary capacity for musical assimilation. Bach, Handel, Wagner, Debussy, Schoenberg and Stravinsky have all contributed to the formation of his language, a language which, because of the very catholicity of the composer's culture, is still in process of evolution. One feels instinctively that the real, the best Honegger is yet to come with his steadily advancing acquisition of a perfected and more highly personal idiom.

He has himself summed up the guiding principles of his æsthetics in a letter which he wrote in September, 1920, to the music critic of "La Victoire". "I attach great importance to the architecture of music and would not like to see it sacrificed to considerations of a literary or pictorial order. . . . My great model is J. S. Bach. . . . I do not, like certain anti-impressionist musicians, seek a

return to harmonic simplicity. On the contrary, I feel that we should use the harmonic materials created by the school which preceded us, but that we should use them in a different way, as a basis for lines and rhythms".

On the whole, Honegger has lived up to these principles which seem to augur a return to the objectivity and formal beauty of classic music. His works are characterized by power of construction, richness of polyphony, athletic rhythms and contrapuntal dissonance, that is, dissonance which results from the shock of melodic lines rather than the structure of chords.

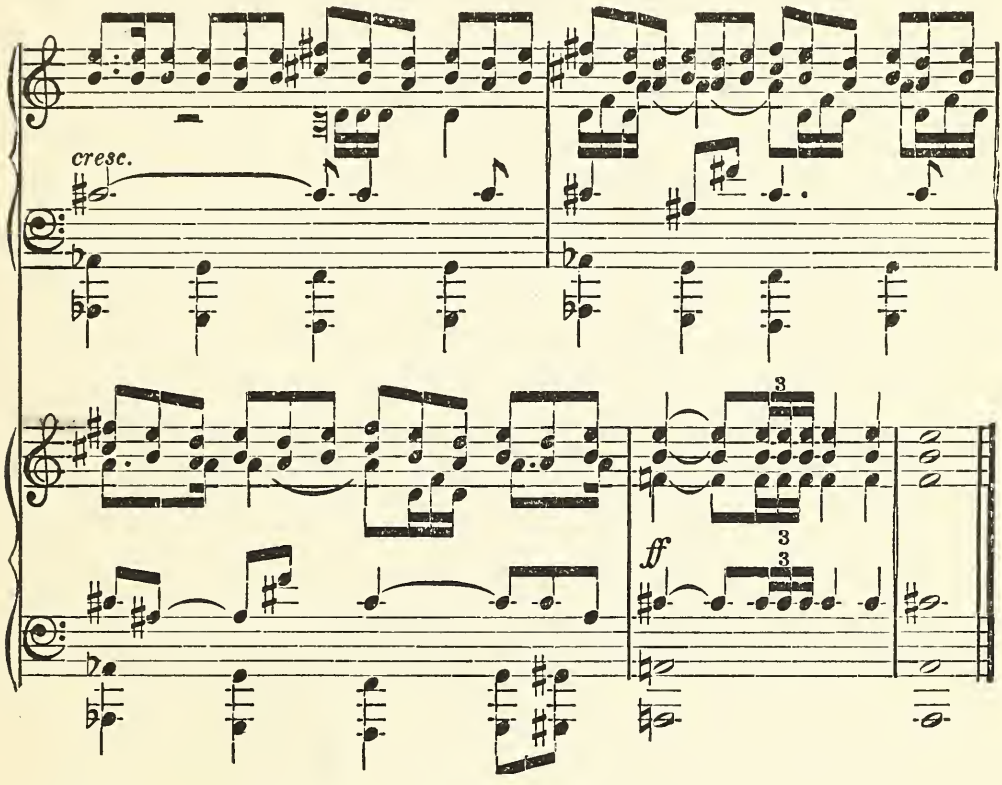
It is difficult to say just why Honegger's idiom is personal, for there is nothing about his style which distinguishes it definitely from that of his contemporaries. Lyric in character, it remains so even when the objectivity of the theme [1] would seem to preclude all possibility of lyricism and one is at a loss to explain the directness of the power which it exercises over us. From a work like "King David",[2] there radiates a sort of magnetic energy that escapes analysis, that seizes upon and holds the imagination with all the suddenness and tenacity of a Handelian chorus and which establishes at once the greatness and permanence of the work.

Honegger's chief compositions are written for the orchestra: "Summer Pastorale", "Horace Victorious", "Prelude for *The Tempest*", "Song of Joy", and "Pacific 231". With the exception of the "Summer Pastorale" (which is relatively homophonic and not, therefore, fully typical), they lose their distinctive merits when transcribed for piano. The vigor and complexity of the counterpoint disappear in the evanescent, uniform sonority of a percussion instru-

[1] As in "Pacific" where even the mechanistic becomes a pretext for lyricism.

[2] A "dramatic poem" for chorus, organ and orchestra.

ment. But "King David", which brought the composer quick and well deserved fame, is, for the most part, more amenable to transcription and can be domesticated with equal pleasure and profit.

The following measures from a "Cortège" in "King David" offer a fair example of his more dissonant manner and are likewise interesting for their successful superposition of four different keys: F minor, F♯ major, D minor and E minor.

Pierre Menu (1896–1919) is little known, for he died when only twenty-three years of age. But by virtue of that mystery which so often permits those who disappear young to express themselves with authority at an age when most people are still seeking their way in life, he gave the impression of having already quite found himself and one could not help but be impressed by the amazing maturity

of his character and his art. In five brief years, from 1914 to 1919, he wrote, during all the anguish and turmoil of the war, a series of works, almost any one of which would ordinarily have been sufficient to gain him distinguished recognition, for all of them bear the indefinable but certain mark of genius. To speak adequately of the qualities which they reveal—their originality, their prodigious technical mastery, the extraordinary power of expression which makes them vibrant with life, the rhythmic force, the rich harmonies and, most of all, their deep tenderness and humanity—would require far more space than we have at our disposal. Fortunately, however, the music itself is so eloquent that, if given the more frequent performance which it merits, it will speak in its own name and will do far more for the memory of Pierre Menu than any testimonies of admiration.

I shall leave to another the task of commenting on the music of my sister, Lili Boulanger (1893-1918).

"In every page of her work, this young girl reconciles the grave power, the authority and rhythmical energy of a man with a certain joyfulness, with the faculty of tender revery suddenly carried to the point of violent and impassioned anguish; that is to say, with traits characteristic at once of a woman who has divined all the tragedies of the human heart and of a child as innocent and as bent by fate as the poor little princess Maleine whose destiny, a symbol of her own, she sought to interpret.[1] Between her soul and ours there is no intermediary; one does not stop to think of technical procedure, of study or talent. The sonorities awaken—and instantaneously a poetry and a sensibility impose themselves upon us with imperious and persuasive gentleness. Even when Mademoiselle Boulan-

[1] The reference is to her unfinished opera, "Princesse Maleine" on a text by Maeterlinck.

ger is commenting on the verses of another, it seems as though the words were her own. So perfectly does she adapt herself to them, that she remoulds them, gives them new meaning."

The musician who, in a few years, composed "The Three Psalms", "Faust and Helen", "Rifts in the Sky" (*Clairières dans le Ciel*),[1] the "Hindu Prayer",[2] and "Princesse Maleine", not to mention ten other compositions, no one of which is of indifferent value, is not a beginner of doubtful promise, but a creative spirit who has accomplished a task and won a place.

"The exquisite and intense figure of Lili Boulanger, facing, without flinching, her terrible destiny, ennobling with her charity the hours which she knew were inexorable, will not move only musicians. She deserves to have symbolic value for all artists and writers who bow with pity and respect before the mystery of premature departures".[3]

Of the many gaps in this brief essay and of its manifest shortcomings, I am only too conscious. It ought rather to have been entitled "A Few Figures in Recent French Music", for the composers whom we seem to have forgotten in it are so numerous and many of them so distinguished that it is better not even to mention them, but to leave to my readers the duty of supplying names and data with which they are all familiar.

By way of conclusion, I could do no better than to quote a paragraph of a recent letter from Roussel, which sums up with clarity and precision what would seem to be the main directives in the latter part of the period we have been studying. "The tendencies of contemporary music", says

[1] Songs.
[2] For chorus and orchestra.
[3] From Camille Mauclair's article on "The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger," in the 1921, August Number of the *Revue Musicale.*

Roussel, "indicate a return to clearer, sharper lines, more precise rhythms, a style more horizontal than vertical; to a certain brutality, at times, in the means of expression—in contrast with the subtle elegance and vaporous atmosphere of the preceding period; to a more attentive and sympathetic attitude toward the robust frankness of a Bach or a Handel; in short, a return, in spite of appearances and with a freer though still somewhat hesitating language, to the traditions of the Classics."

II

DEBUSSY: THE PRELUDES

J'adore l'indécis, les sons, les couleurs frêles,
Tout ce qui tremble, ondule, et frissonne, et chatoie,
Les cheveux, et les yeux, l'eau, les feuilles, la soie,
Et la spiritualité des formes grêles;

Albert Samain.

Le désir seul donne la beauté aux choses.

Anatole France.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY was born August 22, 1862, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a small town but a few miles out of Paris and in the Ile-de-France, the province where French traditions of taste and culture are commonly said to be the purest. His family was apparently not musical and his father planned to make a sailor of him. Consequently, the boy had no musical instruction until 1871, when, during a visit to his aunt, at Cannes, he took some piano lessons from an Italian named Cerutti, who saw in him no signs of exceptional talent. A little later Debussy made the acquaintance of Charles de Sivry, a brother-in-law of Verlaine and a composer of light operas. It was de Sivry's mother who, just about the time her daughter was separating from Verlaine, divined the unusual musical talent of the boy who was later to write some of his greatest songs on poems by her son-in-law. She declared that Debussy must become a musician and took charge herself of his elementary musical education. She must have

performed her task creditably, for, in the fall of 1873, Debussy was able to enter the Paris Conservatory and continue his studies there under Lavignac, Marmontel and Guiraud. The first three years, he won medals in solfeggio; in 1877, a second prize in piano; in 1880 a first prize in accompaniment, but, curiously enough, he was never given any distinction in harmony.

During the summer of 1879, Debussy went to Russia as family pianist to Madame Metch, the wife of a Russian civil engineer. The influence of this trip on Debussy's musical development has probably been somewhat exaggerated. Many critics are inclined to regard it as having been the composer's "road to Damascus", the capital and decisive point in his artistic development. That he heard in Russia some of the works of Borodine and Rimsky-Korsakow is at least probable (though these composers were relatively little known at this time) and we know that he was impressed by the freedom and abandon of Russian gypsy music. But with the music of Moussorgsky he did not become acquainted until later.

On his return to Paris, Debussy continued, of course, his studies at the Conservatory. Guiraud, his professor of composition, appears to have realized something of the extent and significance of the boy's talents and gave him no little individual counsel and encouragement. Under Guiraud's wise guidance, Debussy made rapid progress and a few years later (1884) won, with his cantata "The Prodigal Son", the much coveted Prix de Rome.

From Rome, in accordance with the regulations, Debussy sent back to the Institute as proofs of his industry: the first part of an opera based on Heine's *Almanzor;* "Spring", a suite for orchestra and chorus without text; a "Fantaisie" for piano and orchestra and "The Blessed

Damozel" a work for chorus of women's voices, soli and orchestra, after the well-known poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. But this last composition was not finally completed until after his return to Paris.

In 1889 Debussy made a trip to Bayreuth and was greatly moved by performances of "Tristan", "Meistersinger" and "Parsifal". Shortly afterwards, however, a friend showed him a copy of Moussorgsky's "Boris Godounow" —in its original form, that is, before it had been "corrected" by Rimsky-Korsakow. Debussy was struck by the simplicity of the music, its freedom from operatic oratory, but he seems to have been even more impressed by the directness of the style in "Without Sunlight", a group of songs by the same composer. Just how clearly he recognized the obscure affinity which doubtless exists between his own and Moussorgsky's sensibility, we cannot say. But we know that when he returned, the following year, to Bayreuth, the spell was broken. In the light of the new insights which Moussorgsky's music had given him, Wagner seemed heavy, grandiloquent and incompatible, therefore, with the characteristic qualities of the French temperament, to which clarity, proportion and taste are a spiritual necessity.

Nothing is more astonishing in the personality of Debussy—a personality of brutal force and almost savage instincts—than its deep and insistent desire for refinement. During the years in Rome, Debussy was profoundly unhappy, largely, perhaps, because of the inadequacy of his culture, which prevented him from revelling, as one might have expected him to do, in the rich atmosphere of Roman antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. On his return to Paris he set resolutely to work, reading voraciously, frequenting poets, painters and visiting picture galleries and

expositions; in short, doing everything which seemed humanly possible to fill in the gaps left by his insufficient education. As a result of these efforts, he gradually acquired a culture of extraordinary breadth and subtlety which permitted him to move, and to feel at home, in the most refined and intelligent circles of Parisian society.

The man had the rare knack of recognizing his spiritual ancestors at first sight, of knowing just where to turn for stimulus when stimulus was needed. The same infallible instinct which perceived his artistic kinship with Moussorgsky and which realized so clearly the dangers to a Frenchman of the Wagnerian influence, led him with equal insight to the symbolist and impressionist poets and painters. From about 1890 to 1895 Debussy was a frequent visitor at Mallarmé's apartments in the rue de Rome where, on Tuesday evenings, the great leader of the symbolists received his ever widening circle of disciples and friends. To these gatherings came: Jules Laforgue (for whom Debussy had particular affection, though he never set any of his poems), Gustave Kahn, Stuart Merrill, Henri de Régnier, Pierre Louÿs (author of the "Chansons de Bilitis"), Degas, Whistler, Verlaine (sixteen of whose poems were set to music by Debussy), and others; a choice but heterogeneous company of spirits, held together, for a time, at least, by their common admiration for Mallarmé, by the charm of his personality and the incomparable lucidity of his mind and conversation.

"One entered the room", writes André Gide, "it was evening and you noticed first the extreme silence of the place. The last faint noises of the street died away as one crossed the threshold. Then Mallarmé would begin to speak in that low, musical, unforgettable tone of voice. Strange to say, he thought before he spoke. In his presence

and for the first time, one had the impression of touching, as it were, the reality of thought itself. And silently, insensibly and of its own accord, the conversation would rise to heights of almost religious solemnity".

One can easily imagine what such hours in such company meant to a sensitive spirit like Debussy; and of the kind and extent of their influence, we shall have occasion, a little later, to speak in some detail. It was great and wholly valuable and it was indeed fitting that Debussy, in 1892, should have dedicated to Mallarmé his first important work for orchestra, the "Prélude to the Afternoon of a Faun" (*Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune*).

For nine years, from 1893 to 1902, Debussy worked on his one and only opera, "Pelléas and Mélisande". That he should have chosen Maeterlinck's drama for his text is a tribute to his literary insight and another example of his marvellous knowledge of his own nature and its artistic requirements. The deep humanity of the music; its restrained intensity of expression; the ease and naturalness of a diction which has taken over all the subtle inflections and rhythms of prose, and which is neither speech nor song, but both at once; and, finally, the marvellous unity of atmosphere that pervades the music from beginning to end—an atmosphere heavy with the sorrow and mystery of human life and oppressive, at times, with its burdening sense of man's helplessness before the dark forces of destiny; all these things combine to make the work one of the most extraordinary pieces of lyric drama that has ever been written.

Historically, "Pelléas" represents an almost complete revolution in operatic technique. In it, Debussy both raised and solved the problem of a symbolistic music drama and solved it so well that nothing more remains to be done in

that direction. It would be indeed difficult for a composer to write another opera based on the same conceptions as "Pelléas", just as it will be impossible, in the future, to ignore its many and far-reaching innovations. It is truly a pity that so many excellent musicians have yet to make acquaintance with a work which has its place beside Monteverdi's "Orpheus", "The Marriage of Figaro", "Tristan" and "Boris", as one of the few really great operas in the history of music.

Other important compositions also date from the period when Debussy was working on "Pelléas": "Fêtes Galantes", first series (1892);[1] "String Quartet" (1893); "Nocturnes:[2]—Nuages, Fêtes, Sirènes" (*Clouds, Fêtes, Sirens*), from 1897-1899; "Chansons de Bilitis"[2] (1898). The orchestral works, "La Mer" (*The Sea*) and "Images" (*Gigues, Iberia and Dances of Spring*) are later, appearing in 1905 and 1911, respectively. Deserving of more than the mere casual mention which, for lack of space, we are obliged to give it here, is "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian", incidental music for a "Mystery Play" by d'Annunzio, some numbers of which the composer later arranged into an orchestral suite. Except in certain pages of "Pelléas" and in the first two "Ballads of François Villon" (1910)—which are likewise far too little known—Debussy had never before attained to heights of such serenity and pathos.

All the well-known piano works, apart from the early and rather sentimental "Suite Bergamasque" (1890), appeared after 1900, beginning with "Pour le Piano" (*For the Piano*) in 1901, and leading up to the two volumes of "Préludes" (1910) and the "Études" (1915).

Debussy's last compositions are frankly inferior. But

[1] For orchestra.
[2] Songs.

this is not strange, since they were written under the strain of the war and the steady progress of an incurable disease. André Suarès has described, in moving lines, the man's last appearance in public. "He was paying out of his own purse", says Suarès, "his admission to a charity concert at which some of his works were being given. . . . He had just been very ill and people said he was doomed. He was; for, a short time later, he fell again into the clutches of the malady that was to kill him. I was struck not so much by his thinness as by his air of absence, his appearance of gravity and lassitude. . . . In his eyes, which avoided all contacts, one recognized that desperate irony which men who are soon to depart this life have for those whom they leave behind. Between such people there is already such an abyss. That day, whatever one may suppose or whatever may have been his own hopes for himself, Debussy said his farewell." He died, after months of struggle and suffering on the thirty-first of March, 1918.

Émile Vuillermoz, one of the ablest of French music critics, tells about Debussy an illuminating anecdote which is worth repeating, for it is so pre-eminently characteristic of the way in which the composer approached problems of form. In the light of certain events which it would be useless to recall here, Vuillermoz had been led to write, under Debussy's direction, a sort of manifesto, which summed up the regulative ideas of the composer's attitude toward his art. "With all the zeal inspired by my respect and affectionate admiration for the man, I endeavored", writes Vuillermoz, "to give to my résumé all the clearness, balance and irrefutable logic which so attractive a theme seemed to demand. I took especial care to solder the arguments and to chain my phrases firmly together, so that the arm of an adversary should find no vulnerable spot in

my armor. Consequently, I presented to the master a well forged mechanism whose every bolt had been tightened with a wrench.

"To my great embarrassment, Debussy did not seem to appreciate these scruples of a professional adjuster. After giving his approval to the ideas which formed the nucleus of my work and after appreciating the logic of their sequence, he begged me, with ironic gentleness, to remove all the artifices of style which assured the solidity of the construction, to loosen the pitiless bolts of every conjunctive locution, to abandon the *consequentlys,* the *buts,* the *fors* and the *howevers* which held things together like so many rivets and mortises. He carefully cut what electricians call 'the connections'. Wherever I had sought to tie two propositions together, he intervened and, with a delicate snap of his scissors, set the phrases afloat. Like a master architect who selects and orders his materials so well that he needs no cement for the construction of a vault, Debussy isolated my arguments, gave them air and freedom. And when the task was finished, I could not but recognize that all these 'unharnessed' phrases ran more surely and quickly to their destination than the verbal train whose carriages I had so conscientiously coupled together."

This desire to conceal art by art, to suggest, imply and insinuate rather than to state outright the hidden relationships which guide the sequence of one's ideas, is thoroughly characteristic of Debussy's music and is likewise a master motive in the technique of symbolist and impressionist poetry. There are other obvious points of contact between Debussy and the symbolists and we can consider with profit, for a few moments, the common aspects of their art. But in so doing, however, we would do well to remember that both the music of Debussy and the poetry of the symbolists

were largely predetermined by certain fundamental ways of thinking and feeling characteristic of the epoch in which they lived, and in which such outwardly contrasting forms of art as the brutal and naturalistic novels of Zola and the delicate, impressionistic poetry of a Verlaine both took their source.

In "Monsieur Croche anti-dilletante",[1] Debussy has occasion to speak of Karl Maria von Weber and suggests that he, Weber, was perhaps the first among musicians to be "troubled by the relationship which must exist between the manifold soul of nature and the soul of a human being". It would be difficult to state more concisely an idea which, though not new—in France it has been, in one form or another, a source of inspiration to writers ever since the days of Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre—was a central notion of the symbolists' *Weltanschauung* and a prime factor in Debussy's own personal attitude toward the world of nature. Your English poet, Byron, in a stanza which Liszt inscribed on the fly-leaf of his "Bells of Geneva", has suggested the same thought from a slightly different angle:

> "I live not in myself, but I become
> Portion of that around me; and to me
> High mountains are a feeling."
> (Childe Harold III, 72)

But the lines which are usually quoted in this connection and in which the idea is accompanied by the specifically symbolist note of mystery and of sensuous revery, are these verses of Baudelaire:

[1] The title of the volume in which Debussy published some of the critical articles which he wrote for the *Revue Blanche* and *Gil Blas,* in 1901 and 1903, respectively. In these essays, quite bristling with irony and paradox, he affirms, as one might expect him to do, his predilection for works of taste and refinement, for such men as Mozart, Couperin, Rameau, Watteau and Racine.

> "Nature is a temple whose living pillars at times let fall confused words. There man passes through forests of symbols which observe him with familiar glances.
>
> "There—like echoes, which at a distance, mingle into a dark and profound unity, vast as the night and as the light of day—the colors, sounds, and perfumes to each other make answer"[1].

Beautiful and prophetic lines which foreshadow clearly the manner in which the changing, sensuous beauty of the spectacle and, most of all, the mystery of man's relationship to it were to fascinate and tease the minds of the symbolists. For a Mallarmé or a Samain, so strange and obscure is the nature of man's part in it all, that one cannot hope to state, or even to describe, the quality of the relationship. It is too dark, too subtle and eludes all efforts at analysis.

Yet man's sense of his kinship with the outer world is deep and ineradicable. He feels, though he does not understand it. It is a matter of instinct rather than of reason. Consequently, if he would draw aside the curtain and look beyond, the poet must abandon, for a moment, the ordinary processes of thought, sink back into the realms of the subconscious and trust for temporary guidance to the obscure, spontaneous movements of the soul and to the warm immediacy of sense perception.

Then and then only can he paint the beauties of the outer world and at the same time suggest, by the psychological accuracy of his images and the order in which they occur, that dim and distant region where nature and human nature touch, where the objects of the visible world melt,

[1] *La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers*
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

as it were, into their spiritual and human reality and significance.

To be a symbolist, then, is to be an imagist and, more important still, to be a master of suggestion who knows how to throw into the background and, at times, even to eliminate, by a subtle emphasis of their "color" and sound, the too precise and circumscribed concepts which attach to words.

Because of the ineffable mystery of his theme, the symbolist, like Verlaine, dreams of writing "the grey song, in which the precise and the indefinite meet". He avoids, as too harsh and crude, the ordinary uses of words. ("To name an object is to destroy three-fourths of one's pleasure in it.")[1] He has an eye not so much to their actual, as to their possible meanings and prizes them, above all else, for their musicality,[2] their color and sensuousness—in short for their suggestive values.

Naturally, one must not look, in symbolist poetry, for heroic moods, for long impassioned flights of lyricism nor for the cumulative effects of "architecture" and "development".[3] They inevitably have no part in an art which moves in the realms of the subconscious and is based so largely on the fleeting impressions of the senses. The intensity and life of symbolist poetry lie rather in its vividness of imagery and suggestion and if it shuns "construction", it does not, for that reason, become formless. It has form and it has logic, but its logic is the logic of the senses and its form, the form inherent in the natural sequence of sense impressions. In the nature of the case it could not be otherwise.

[1] Mallarmé.
[2] "Music, first of all." (*De la Musique avant toute chose.*) Verlaine.
[3] "Take eloquence and wring its neck." (*Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui le cou.*) Verlaine.

An art thus based on the fugitive impressions of sense and instinct is peculiarly adapted to rendering those diffused and subtle moods of revery which rise mysteriously to the surface when the mind is silent and the senses alert. The half-shades of the evening with their accompanying sense of the changing and transitory, the languorous melancholy, the silence, mystery, and the magic beauty of the night;—these are the themes which inspire the poems of Mallarmé and his school, poems which, in the words of Rémy de Gourmont, are "the most marvellous pretext for revery that has ever been offered to man".

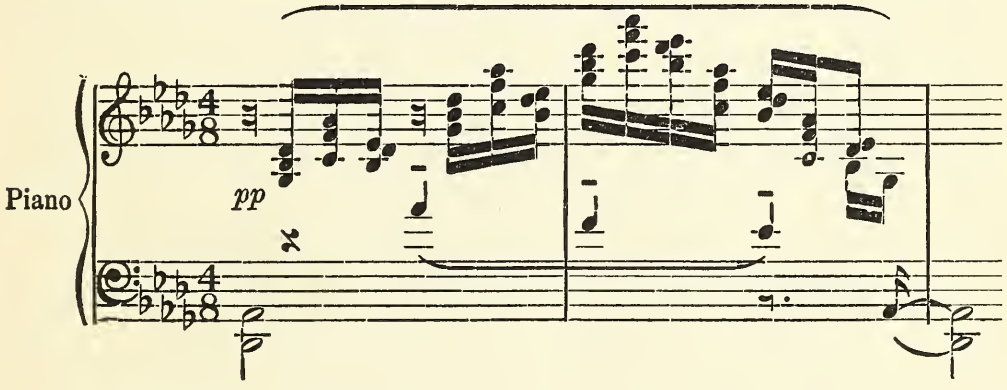
The statement is equally apt when applied to the music of Debussy, for the latter springs from the same pantheistic view of nature and is the product of a similar technique of sensuous suggestion. The landscape, for Debussy, as it is for the symbolists, is "a state of the soul". He is haunted, as they are, by the desire to render simultaneously its outward and visible beauties and their inner and human significance. Consequently, the marvellous imagery of his music is a means, not an end. For example, what is chiefly remarkable about "Nuages" is not the faithfulness of the picture but rather the manner in which the composer has suggested the melancholy solitude and desolation of spirit which the sight of clouds, drifting slowly and aimlessly across the sky, so frequently arouses in us.

Consider, for a moment, the titles of some of Debussy's compositions: "Clouds", "Wind on the Plains", "Reflections in the Water", "The Sea", "Fog", "Goldfish", "Perfumes of the Night". Obviously what attracts him most, as it does the symbolists, is the fugitive and mysterious side of nature.

In the human realm, however, Debussy is drawn in pre-

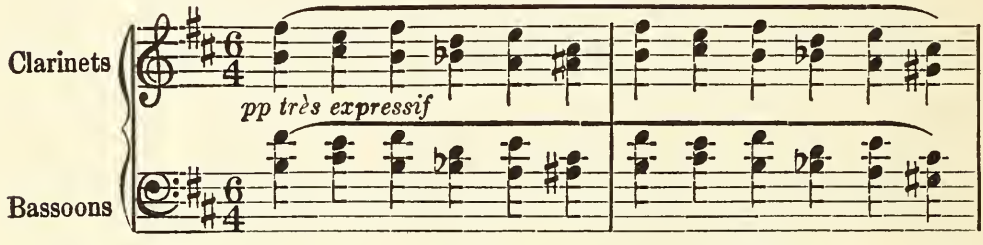
cisely the opposite direction, that is, toward the unreflective, the spontaneous, the involuntary and instinctive. Hence, his predilection for childlike natures, for the dramas of Maeterlinck, whose shadowy characters act less than they are acted upon—by Fate. As Rémy de Gourmont says of them, "they can but suffer, smile, love; when they try to understand, their troubled efforts give way to anguish and their revolt fades into sobbing. They are climbing, always climbing, the painful slopes of Calvary only to strike their heads against an iron door". In a word, it is the "human" side of nature and the "natural" side of man which particularly interest Debussy. And in this respect he is thoroughly characteristic of his age and generation, the generation of Bergson, that was brought up on Darwin, Taine, Bernard and Renan.

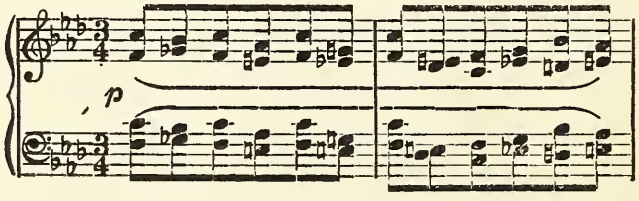
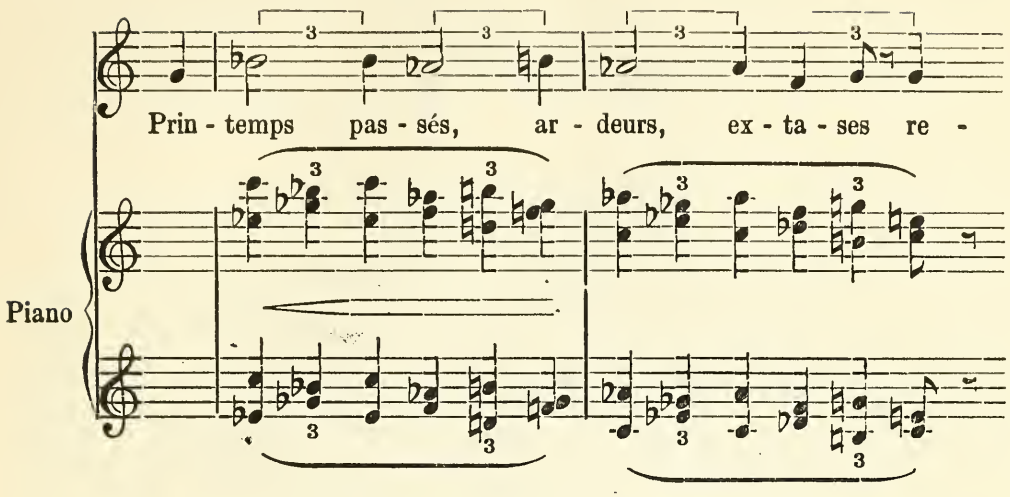
There are also illuminating analogies between certain coloristic aspects of Debussy's music and the technique of impressionistic painting. Take, for example, the opening measures of "Reflections in the Water", where, by the use of

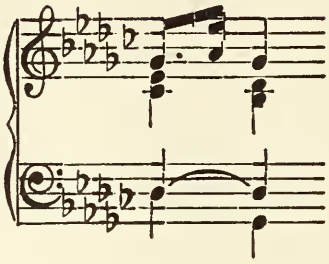


the sustaining pedal, Debussy has blended a whole series of chords into one large, composite stretch of diaphanous sonority. The procedure is quite characteristic of both his piano music and the works for orchestra (where he secures the same effect by *glissandi* on the harp, or by a subtle, overlapping arrangement of the harmonies) and recalls

the manner in which Monet, for example, gets his complementary tones and shades by a sharp juxtaposition of little daubs of primary colors which are fused and blended by the distant eye. The resemblance between the two methods is so striking that the musical device would almost seem to be a direct transposition of the technique of one art into the realms of another. Yet one would scarcely be willing to draw, from such circumstantial evidence, so audacious a conclusion.

Among the specifically musical influences which assisted in the formation of Debussy's style—a style which, in its harmonic aspects, seems at first sight so personal and revolutionary that one might easily make the mistake of thinking that it represents a complete break with the past—we have already had occasion to speak of "Boris Godounow", of the relationship which doubtless exists between the simplicity and directness of Moussorgsky's diction and the free, arioso-like recitative of "Pelléas and Mélisande". Some historians have gone farther and largely on the strength of the resemblance between these measures from "Clouds",

and the following passage from a song in Moussorgsky's "Without Sunlight" [1]

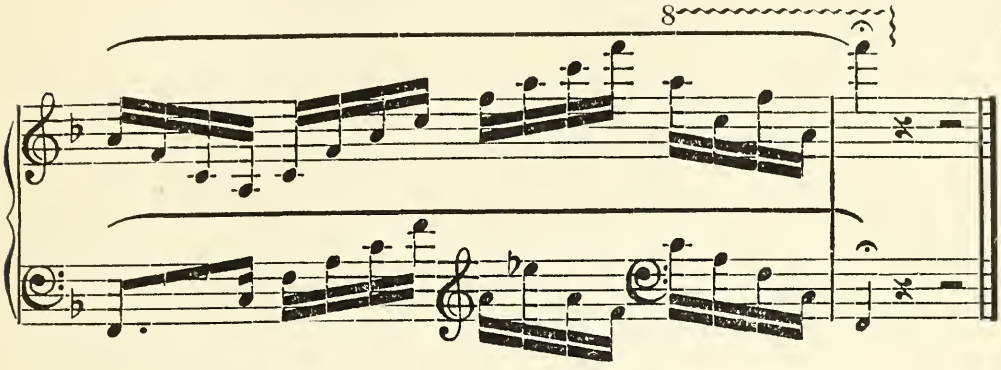
[1] See also these measures from Stravinsky's "Nightingale":

have established a direct and certainly exaggerated connection between the harmonic styles of the two composers. The passage in question may well represent an unconscious reminiscence, on Debussy's part, of a song with which we know he was acquainted. But the fact still remains that the measures from "Without Sunlight" are far more characteristic of Debussy's than they are of Moussorgsky's style. They represent, on the part of the latter composer, one of those mysterious anticipations of the language of a future age, of which there are so many examples in musical history and which have too often tended to provoke controversies that are more amusing than they are illuminating.

The origins of Debussy's harmonic style are to be sought elsewhere; in Liszt, Chabrier and Fauré, rather than in Moussorgsky. The affiliations between Liszt's harmony and the harmony of Debussy are real but somewhat obscure and are most apparent, perhaps, in one or two mutually characteristic ways of connecting triads. The free and expressive manner in which Fauré uses seventh chords is prophetic of Debussy's similar and later use of chords of the ninth. The following cadential formula,

almost an obsession with Chabrier, occurs, in one form or another, again and again in the "Preludes", making the impression of reminiscence unavoidable. Chabrier's influence is likewise apparent in certain arpeggiated forms of melodic line (based usually on the notes of secondary seventh chords) common to both composers and in those sudden lapses into a rather vulgar lyricism and the more popular moods of street song and music-hall to which we shall later have occasion to draw specific attention.

In 1915, Debussy published his two volumes of "Études" for the piano and dedicated them "to the memory of Frederic Chopin". The inscription is significant, for it represents a conscious homage to the composer whose influence was a chief and guiding factor in the formation of Debussy's piano style.

For many musicians, Chopin's greatness has been somewhat obscured by his rather promiscuous popularity in the concert hall and by the flabby and spineless manner of playing his music which has gradually and insidiously established itself as a "Chopin Tradition". The electric force and abandon of his rhythms, the pride, nobility and martial splendor which are the national heritage of every Pole, have been sacrificed to an effeminate sentimentality which obscures both the refinement and the delicacy, as well as the essential manliness, of Chopin's music.

We shall have to rediscover Chopin, reappreciate his amazingly original harmonies, the individuality of his piano

style with its wide, delicately sonorous spacing of chords, and realize anew the astonishing prophetic qualities of measures like these:

In these final measures of the F major "Prelude", Chopin has dared to add the seventh harmonic to the triad and to treat it as a consonance, as a point of final repose. In that single Eb is implicit all the delicate and sensuous delight in sonorities so characteristic of modern music and to which we shall have frequently to refer in the following commentary on Debussy's Preludes.

Volume I.

I. Dancers of Delphos (*Danseuses de Delphes*)

A slow, stately dance in the simple three part key-scheme found in so many of the Preludes of Bach, namely: Part I, tonic key with inflection, at the end, toward the dominant (measures 1-10); Part II, dominant, with allusions to related keys (11-20); Part III, tonic (21 to the end). Note, in the 18th measure, the delicately sonorous disposition of the harmony and the subtle way in which the timbre of the isolated octaves on C is modified by the addition of the Ab triad.

II. Sails (*Voiles*—the word is ambiguous and could also be translated *Veils*).

The piece might well have been inspired by some remembered sight of sail-boats drifting listlessly at anchor. It is extraordinary for the vagueness of its atmosphere and the manner in which it suggests—to me, at least—the paradoxical sense of mobility in immobility. With the exception of six measures (based on one of the pentatonic scales: E♭, G♭, A♭, B♭ and D♭), the Prelude is entirely constructed on the notes of the whole-tone scale, a scale which, little by little, assumed a rôle of no slight importance in Debussy's work, and whose origins are far back in the past.[1]

III. Wind on the Plains (*Vent dans la Plaine*)

Obviously a "descriptive" piece, remarkable for the vividness with which the composer has suggested the light, swift, capricious movement of the wind and the silence and the vastness of the plains.

IV. "Sounds and Perfumes Turn in the Evening Air" (*Les Sons et les Parfums Tournent dans l'Air du Soir*—Baudelaire.)

The languor and mystery of a summer night with its accompanying, diffused sense of melancholy and solitude. On page 2, at the points marked "Rubato", are examples of the somewhat vulgar and equivocal lyricism characteristic of Chabrier, to which we have previously alluded. Notice also the originality and mystery of the sonorities in the passage marked "Tranquille et Flottant" and, at the very end, the chords—of such frequent and characteristic

[1] The more recent stages in the evolution of the whole-tone scale have been traced by Mr. Hill in his book on *Modern French Music*, p. 201 ff.

occurrence in Debussy's piano music—so vividly suggestive of the timbre of the French Horn.

V. "The Hills of Anacapri" (*Les Collines d'Anacapri*)

An impression of Italy—the clear and fathomless blue of its sky, the brilliance of its sun, the melodious clang of noon-tide bells and the nonchalant gaiety, the banale but irresistible romanticism of the Italian street-song. The piece is an interesting example of the way impressionism and realism tend, at times, to merge imperceptibly into one another, a phenomenon so typical of the impressionistic school of painting and also strikingly evident (though in a very different way as far as the emotional effect is concerned) in the work of Malipiero.

VI. "Footsteps in the Snow" (*Des pas sur la Neige*)

An evocation of the melancholy solitude and desolation of a winter landscape. Two pages in which, by the magic of musical suggestion, everything is expressed but nothing said outright and yet which reach the most intimate recesses of the human soul.

VII. "What the West Wind Saw" (*Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest*).

The tumultuous movement of the sea, lashed and whipped by the fury of the winds. The composer's expression marks—*animated and tumultuous, plaintive and distant, strident, incisive, rapid and furious*—indicate pretty clearly the range of the feelings that dominate the composition, but only the music itself can give any idea of its elemental grandeur and power.

VIII. "The Girl with the Flaxen Hair" (*La Fille aux cheveux de lin*).

Like the *Blessed Damozel,* a "Preraphaelite" composition, which, had the artist been as much of a musician as he was a poet and a painter, might well have been written by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the author of these lines:

> Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
> Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
> Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

The influence of Chabrier is apparent in the melodic turn of the theme and in the frequent use, in one form or another (measures 9-10, 12-13, 15-16, 18-19, 19-20, 20-21) of the cadential formula which we have previously cited in connection with Chabrier.

IX. "The Interrupted Serenade" (*La Sérénade Interrompue*)

The title alone is sufficient indication of the idea of the piece, which is another example of the use of realistic detail in a composition that is essentially impressionistic in methods and mood. The incisiveness and precision with which Debussy, by a few well chosen strokes of his pen, has attained his end, is amazing.

X. "The Cathedral under the Sea" (*La Cathédrale engloutie*)

The work was inspired by an old Breton legend which tells how the town of Ys, swallowed up long, long ago by the sea, rises, at times, from the depths of the ocean and gradually becomes visible in all its ancient grandeur, only to disappear again, a moment later, beneath the waves.

Especially remarkable is the manner in which the theme gradually emerges from the misty harmony of the opening measure. Note, too, the specifically impressionistic technique by virtue of which the "primary colors" of successive chords are fused by the pedal into a single mass of hazy, shimmering sonority.

XI. "Puck's Dance" (*La Dance de Puck*)

The flashing lightness and grace of swift, ethereal movement and the mischievous caprice and irony which we associate with the fantastic character of Shakespeare's play. The composer has used extensively the horn-like sonorities which we have already remarked were one of the characteristic features of his piano style.

XII. "Minstrels" (*Minstrels*)

The boisterous humour and facile charm of the music-hall; a mood typical of Chabrier in his "hail-fellow-well-met" vein. What subtlety of observation lurks beneath the apparent facility of so banale a theme and what judgment in the selection of the details to be retained! A few decisive lines, sketched in under the guidance of an eye whose ironic glance seems to be wandering absently over the scene which, in reality, it is observing with pitiless scrutiny, suffice to suggest an entire picture and to establish completely the atmosphere which it evokes.

Only a genius could handle so vulgar a theme successfully. But, after all, in the presence of such a masterpiece, one realizes that, as far as art is concerned, there are no vulgar subjects, but only certain problems which are raised and solved, or not. Here the solution has obviously been found—and with bewildering ease and mastery.

Volume II.

I. "Fog" (*Brouillards*)

Vaporous sonorities, hovering uncertainly in the air, from which there gradually emerges a short, phantom-like phrase that is soon lost again in the mists of suspended harmonies. A flash or two of brighter sonorities; then another fragmentary motive appears—and disappears. The first phrase returns, but once more fades away, in the slowly dissipating fog.

II. "Dead Leaves" (*Feuilles Mortes*)

The vague and regretful melancholy which we associate with autumn and the passing of the summer season. It is one of the compositions in which Debussy's powers of suggestion are at their highest. This chord or that, in a manner now tender, now profound, has a way of making one divine all that the composer would otherwise have kept secret. The diversity of the images, their incessant transformation have been so discreetly insinuated that no detail ever intrudes to break the general outlines of the piece. Misty, yet distinct and spotted here and there with gold, they are ever hovering before our wondering eyes.

III. "The Portal of the Vine" *(La Puerta del Vino)*

A marvellously vivid evocation of popular Spain, of the life in street and tavern, incarnate, as it is here in the spirit of the Spanish dance with all that the latter implies of insolent provocation, of voluptuous abandon and insinuating tenderness, of sudden violence and the sting of sharp desire. The piece was inspired by a mere picture-post-card which Manuel de Falla sent the composer from Spain

IV. "The Fairies are Exquisite Dancers" (*Les Fées sont d'exquises danseuses*)

Aerial lightness, rapidity and grace; the ethereal sensuousness of an impalpable world of fairy movement and color.

V. "Heather" (*Bruyères*)

A delicate and gracious bit of fancy and autumnal color. The influence of Chabrier is obvious.

VI. "The Eccentric General Lavine" (*Général Lavine-excentrique*)

Debussy's impression of a clown and a delightful piece of pompous humour and burlesque.

VII. "The Terrace where the Moon Receives" (*La Terrace des Audiences du Clair de Lune*)

One of the greatest of the "Preludes" and a miracle of symbolist expressiveness which tempts one to quote the following passage from "Monsieur Croche anti-dilletante". . . . "Music alone has the power to evoke, at will, those imaginary sites and that fantastic but indubitable world which is secretly at work in the mysterious poetry of the night, in the thousand anonymous noises of the leaves, caressed by the rays of the moon."

The title comes from one of the "Indian Letters" which René Puaux wrote for *Le Temps,* but Godet, who divulged the origin of the phrase, is careful not to say whether the music was written before or after Debussy happened to encounter it.[1]

[1] In this and other connections it is interesting to note that Debussy has inscribed his titles at the end, instead of at the head of the "Preludes".

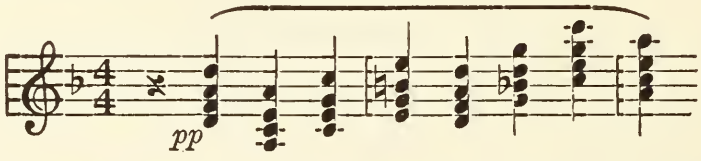
VIII. "Ondine" (*Ondine*)

The mobility and seductive grace of the mermaid and one of the many examples on the way in which the charm of flowing water fascinated and inspired the imagination of the composer of the "Preludes".

IX. "Homage to Mr. Pickwick, Esq. P.P.M.D.C." (*Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq. P.P.M.D.C.*)

A Frenchman's impression of the pompous amiability and humour of Dickens' celebrated character. The mock gravity in Debussy's citation of "God Save the King" is irresistible.

X. "Funeral Urn." (*Canope*)

The cool and quiet melancholy of a bygone world—suggested by the chaste contours of an ancient urn. The opening measures,

offer a typical example of parallel melodic progression, similar in spirit to the old *organum* and of frequent occurrence in Debussy's music. The feeling of such passages is primarily melodic, the harmonies being rather a by-product of the multiple and parallel melodic lines.

XI. "Alternating Thirds" (*Les Tierces Alternées*)

An *Étude,* whose technical difficulties conceal great delicacy and charm. Notice the long melodic phrase outlined by the upper notes of the first third in every measure. One cannot but marvel at the richness of an imagination which

sees in a mere technical problem so many possibilities of delight and beauty.

XII. "Fireworks" (*Feux d'Artifice*)

A brilliant piece of pictorial virtuosity, containing, at the very end, an "impressionistic" citation from the "Marseillaise".[1]

Musicians are loath to write about music, too add, as we have done here, verbal commentary to compositions like the "Préludes", compositions whose beauty and poetry speak so eloquently that one is ashamed to have approached them except in silence. One has only to listen to such music to love it and to understand why it is that all nations honor the memory of Claude Debussy and recognize him, not only as the representative of a characteristic moment of French sensibility, but as one of the truly great composers of the world.

[1] It would be difficult to read over the "Preludes" without remembering what those who had the good fortune to hear Debussy play have said about his touch. His manner of playing was quite inimitable. So exquisite was the delicacy, the richness of his sonorities, and so masterly were the effects of color which he conjured forth from his pedals, that one forgot that the piano was an instrument with hammers.

III

STRAVINSKY.[1]

SELDOM have the compositions of any composer provoked such hot debate, such violent hatreds and intense enthusiasms as has the work of Igor Stravinsky. The excitement and tumult which reigned at the first performance, in 1913, of the "Sacred Rites of Spring", an event which is usually referred to as "the battle of the *Sacre*", were such as to make one think one was attending some crucial session of the Chamber of Deputies, some sort of political manifestation rather than a performance of Diaghilew's Russian Ballet. People shouted, whistled, screamed, stamped and even came to blows over their no uncertain opinions, for it was impossible, in the presence of such music, to remain neutral. The suspended or the lukewarm judgment would have been ridiculous in such an atmosphere. One either loved or hated the music and that was the end of the matter. Now, of course, the work is universally recognized as a masterpiece and its composer is everywhere acknowledged to be the foremost figure in contemporary music and—what is more amusing, in the light of his supposed anarchistic tendencies—the chief representative of a return to classic traditions.

We will not attempt, in so short an article, to trace the

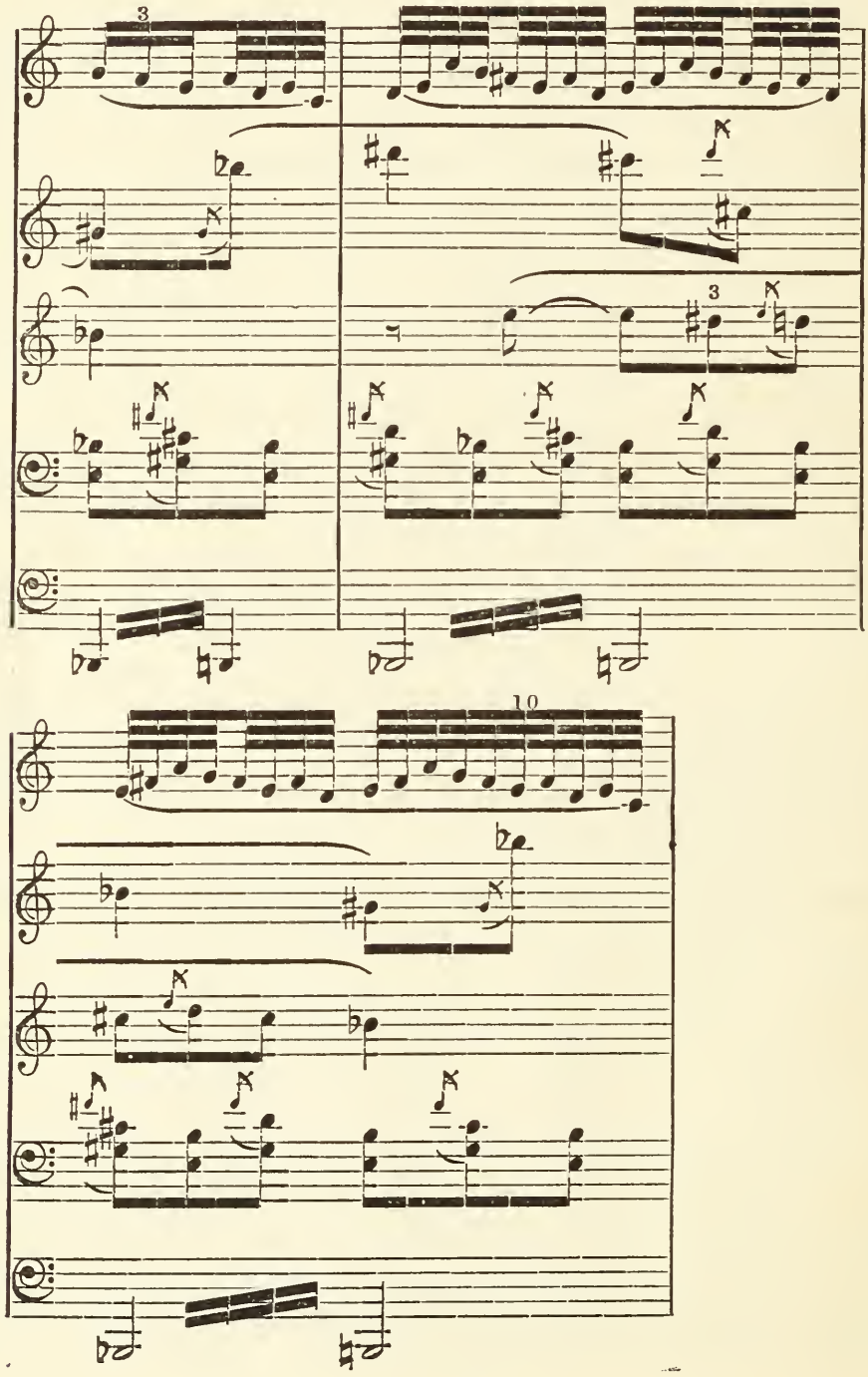
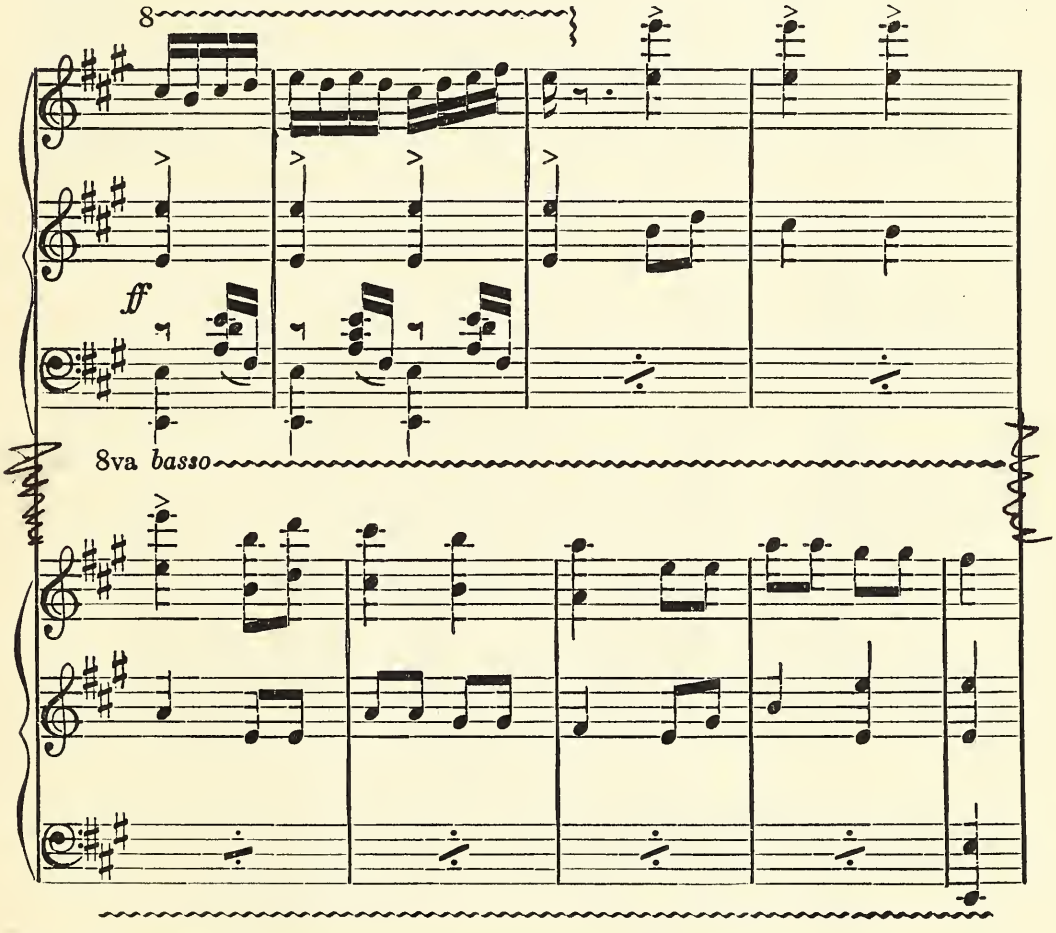
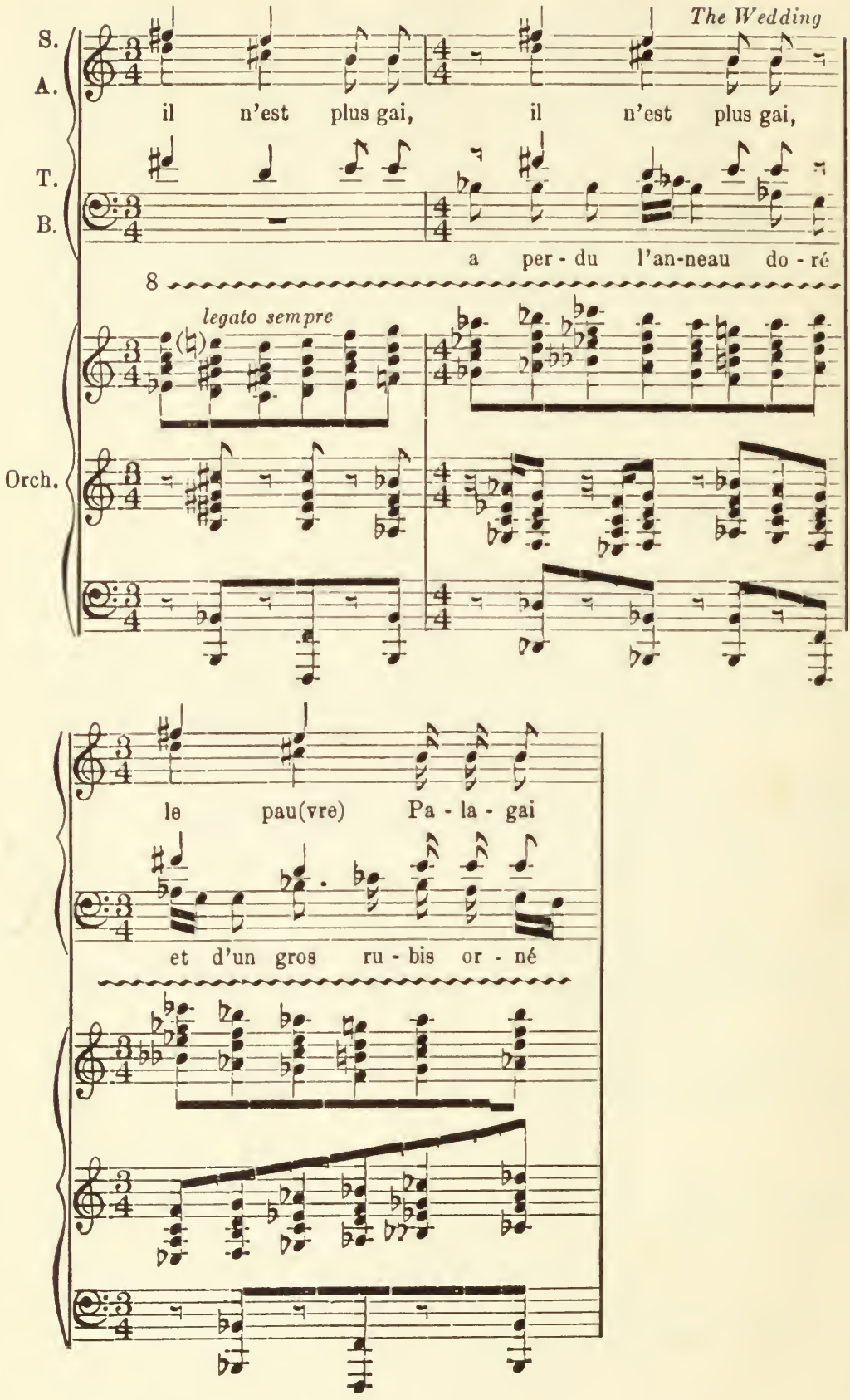
[1] Igor Stravinsky was born at Oranienbaum in 1882. His father was an opera singer, yet, strangely enough, the boy studied first to be a lawyer and it was only at the age of twenty-one, after a meeting with Rimsky-Korsakow, that he abandoned the law and began, under Rimsky-Korsakow's direction, to prepare himself systematically for the career of a professional musician.

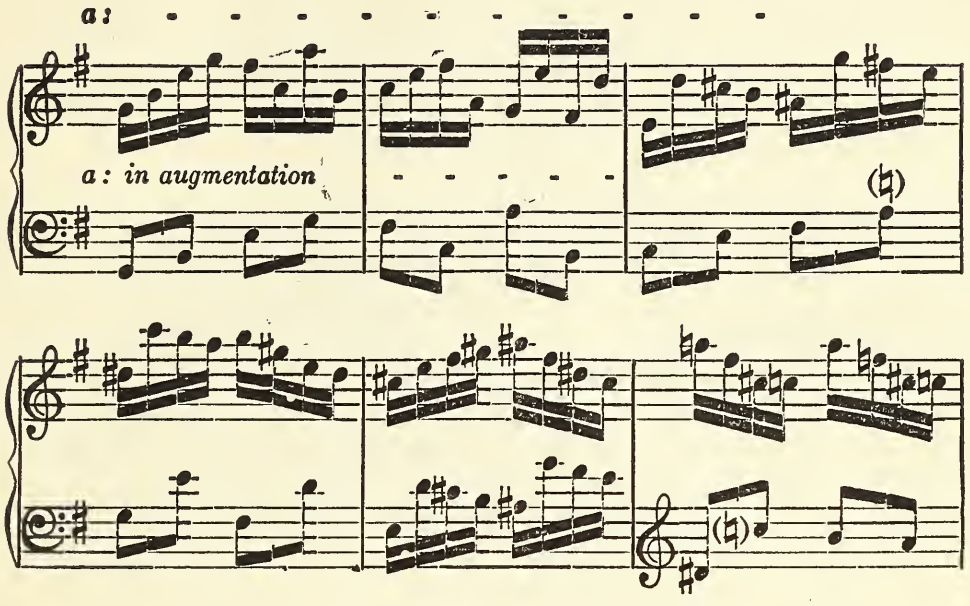
extraordinary evolution of Stravinsky's style, for to do so would entail individual discussion of a large part of his works, many of which are so distinctive, so different from the ones which precede or follow them,[1] that it is peculiarly difficult, and in some cases impossible, to find any logical and illuminating method of arranging them into groups or "periods". The limits of our lecture forbid our discussing the works, in large measure, singly and in detail. Hence we shall simply endeavor to sketch in the general outlines of Stravinsky's art, its underlying tendencies and to give the more important of the influences under which it has evolved.

The chief obstacle which blocks the way to most people's appreciation of Stravinsky's music is its dissonance, for all the works after "Petrouchka" *are* dissonant, some of them, extremely so. And what makes the obstacle especially difficult to overcome is the fact that Stravinsky's dissonance is far more contrapuntal than it is harmonic, that is, it results from the clash of melodic lines rather than the structure of chords. Ever since the days of Haydn and Mozart, our ears have been trained to hear practically in but one direction, that is, vertically and, in consequence, we have more or less lost the art of listening to contrapuntal music, of following lines rather than chords. Even Bach we hear, in large measure, harmonically and are tempted to pay more attention to the vertical concordance, than we do to the contours, of his melodies. Yet, these perpendicular concordances do not, for the most part, have the value of chords, but are rather accidental aggregations of notes —to call them harmonies would be inaccurate—which have resulted from the conduct of the multiple and independent lines. On the other hand, however, it is true that such

[1] For instance, such radically different works as "The Firebird", "Petrouchka" and "The Sacred Rites of Spring" followed each other in quick succession. They date respectively from 1909-10, 1910-11, and 1911-13.

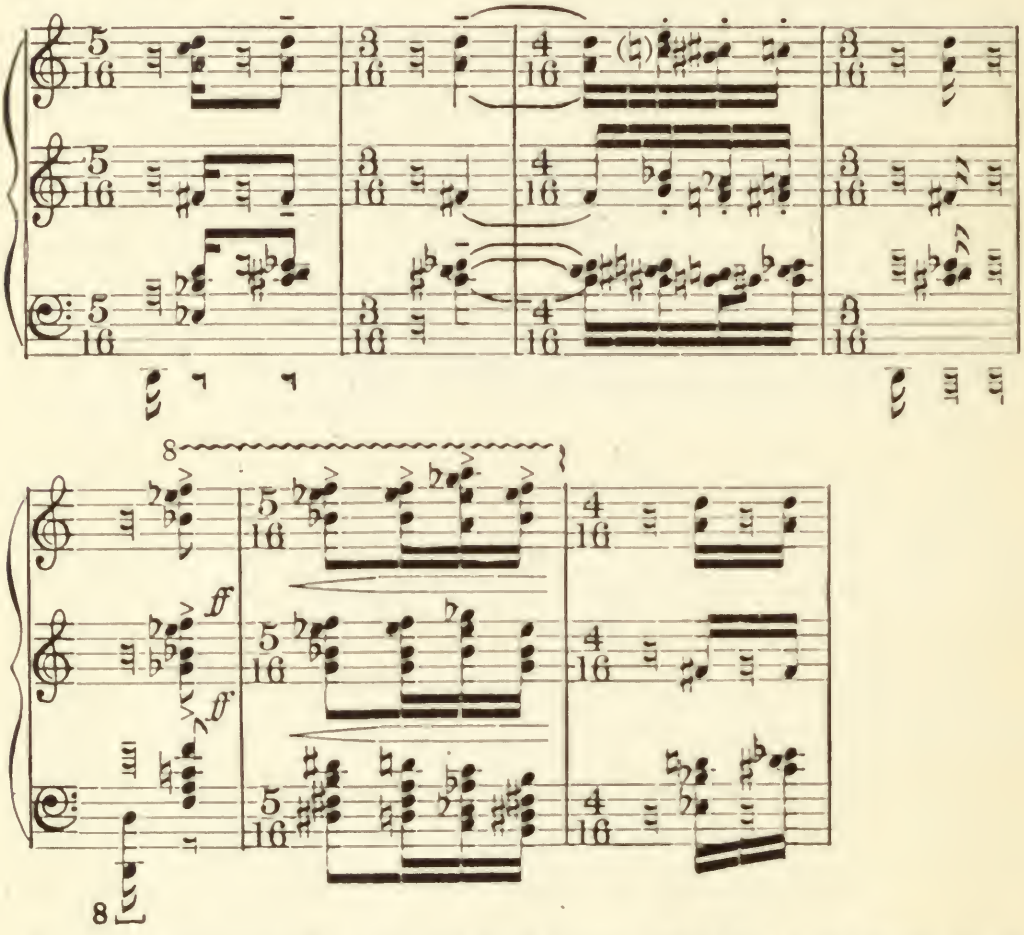
concordances constitute a sort of harmonic skeleton. But it is only a skeleton and its presence should be felt rather than perceived and surely not consciously and continually observed by the listener.

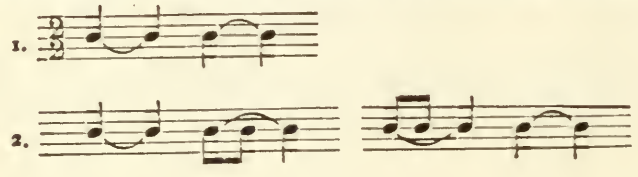
In Stravinsky's music, we are not only confronted by

counterpoint, but by counterpoint whose vertical concordances are new and which, being new, naturally draw our attention so forcibly to them that we lose sight of the lines which produced them and which ought to be our chief concern. One has but to glance at the measures from "The Sacred Rites of Spring", on the preceding page, to realize at once that they are essentially linear in character. In this respect, they are quite typical, for most of Stravinsky's music is pre-eminently melodic and it is interesting to note how his polyphony has passed from the relative simplicity of contrapuntal device which characterizes "Petrouchka" (1910-11),

to the more complicated polyphony in "Sacre" (1911-13) and "The Wedding" (1917),

The Wedding
S.
A.
T.
B.
Orch.
il n'est plus gai, il n'est plus gai,
a per - du l'an-neau do - ré
legato sempre
le pau(vre) Pa - la - gai
et d'un gros ru - bis or - né

only to return to the extraordinary concentration and economy of the "Piano Sonata" (1924).[1]

To appreciate such music, it is obvious that we must establish new habits of hearing, re-acquire a new sense of the old linear values which were the pride of the Renaissance and the glory of Bach.

But there is a greater difficulty in Stravinsky's music, namely, the element of rhythm, and here the trained musician and the layman are equally embarrassed. For several centuries now, we have lived under the tyranny of the barline, of a "strong" beat which reoccurs at *regular* intervals with insistent monotony. Consequently, we find ourselves helpless when we are forced, as we are so often in Stravinsky's music, to admit another type of rhythm, a rhythm in which the metre is constantly changing and where we are obliged to feel accents at intervals that are no longer regular. Stravinsky's music suggests the old Greek system of rhythm which (instead of taking, as we do, a

[1] Notice, in the last example, the use of the old contrapuntal device known as "augmentation".

maximum unity, like the whole-note, and cutting it up into various small divisions, e.g. halves, quarters, eighths, etc.) took a minimum unity and multiplied it by any even or odd number, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 etc. This is precisely what Stravinsky does, for instance, in the last tableau of "The Sacred Rites of Spring":

Nor is the example an isolated one; we find the same procedure in a great many of his themes, from which I cite, at random, the following:[1]

[1] It is illuminating to compare the metre of these themes with the metre of the first few lines of a speech in Euripides' Hippolytus:

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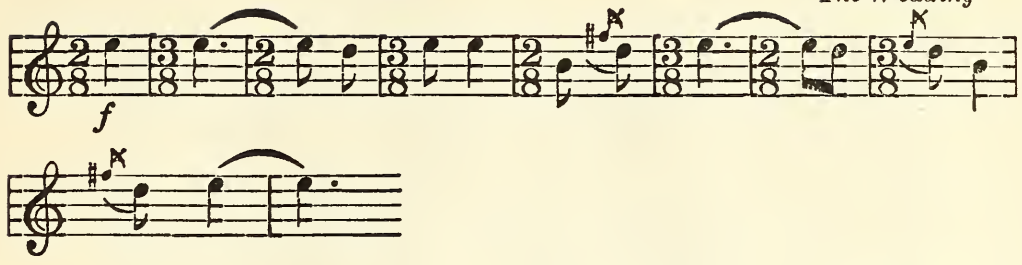
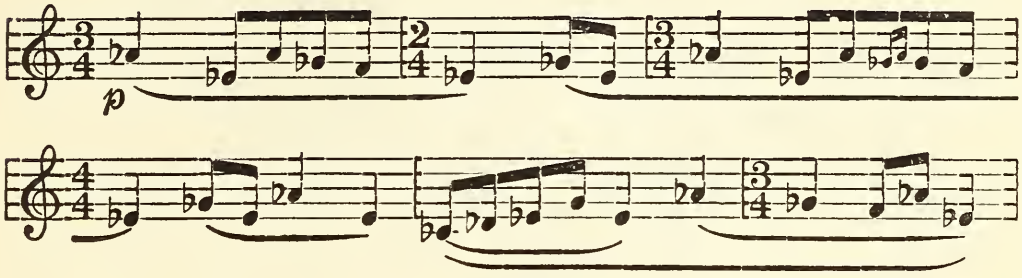
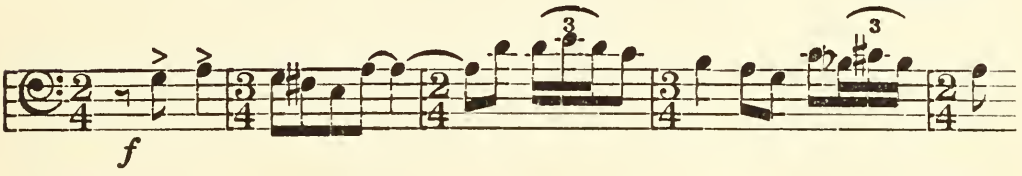
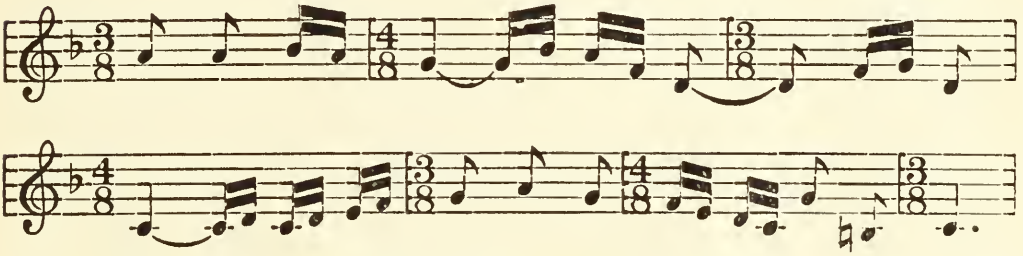
The Wedding



Sacre

Renard

Mavra

The difficulty is doubled when, as in this passage from "The Story of the Soldier", Stravinsky superposes rhythms

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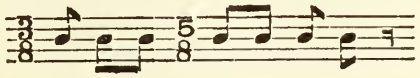
3.



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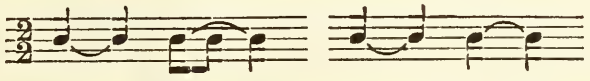
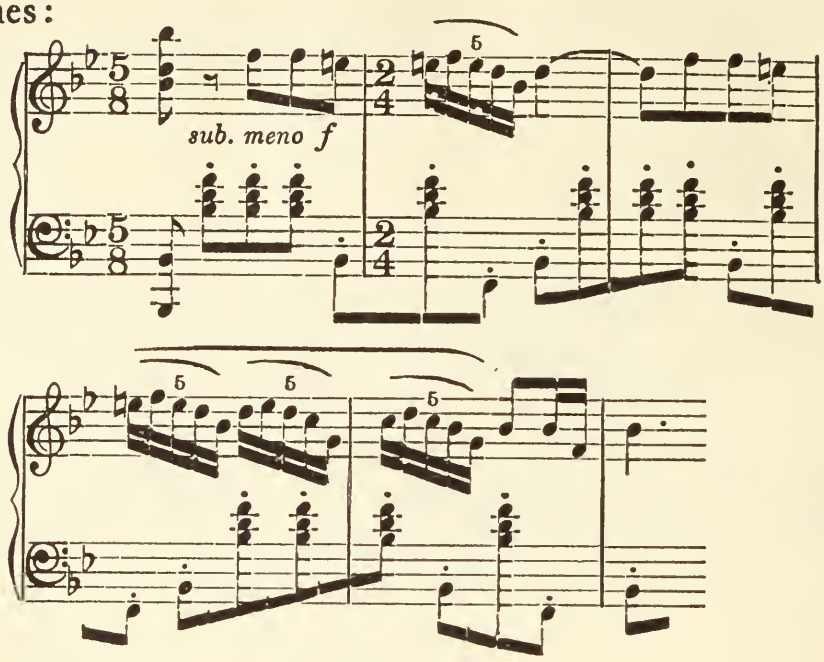
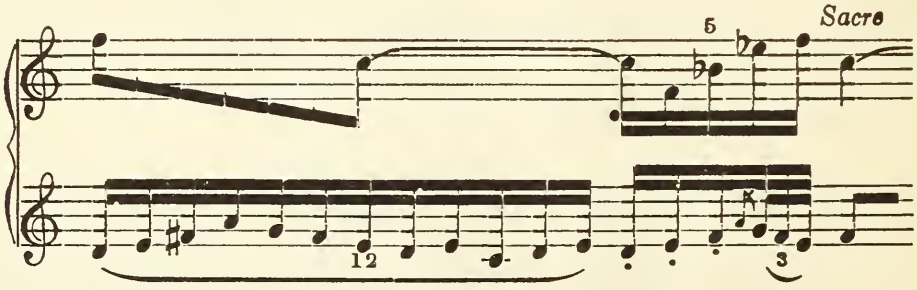


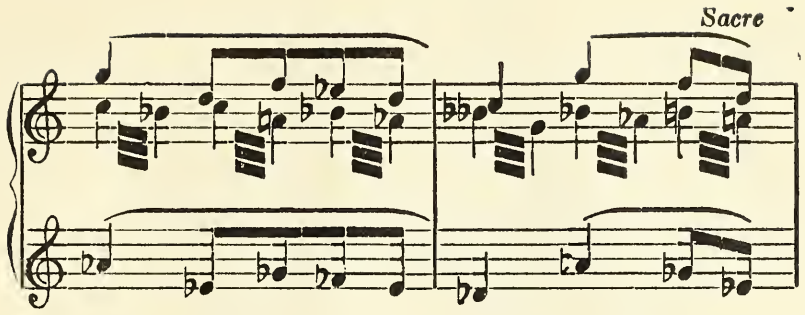
5.

In both cases the principles of rhythmical structure are obviously the same. For a detailed study of the musical aspect of Greek metres, see Maurice Emmanuel's book: *Histoire de la Langue Musicale,* Paris, 1911.

in much the same way as the contrapuntist superposes themes:

One has only to try to play these measures to realize how ill-equipped we are to cope with the rhythmical problems [1] of Stravinsky's music. Yet we shall never fully understand it until we have mastered them, until we have acquired the physical sensation of his rhythms and made them our own.

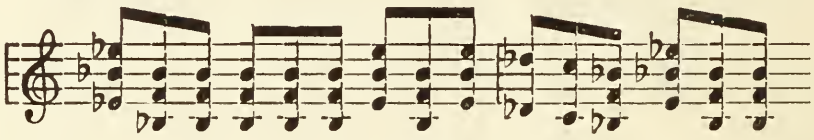
Stravinsky's music is fundamentally tonal, that is, it gravitates around a "home" key which is usually affirmed, in no uncertain manner, by a perfect cadence. Occasionally, it is true, there are equivocal measures like these:



[1] Or even, for that matter, with those presented by the music of Bach. How many pianists, for instance, can play a Bach fugue with perfect clarity, that is, in a manner which makes quite clear the rhythmic, no less than the melodic, independence of the parts.?

which, at a first glance, would seem to be polytonal. Yet in spite of such passages, I do not think that in Stravinsky's case one can properly speak of polytonality. As Boris de Schloezer has said:[1] "There is genuine polytonality where, as in the *Symphonic Études* of Milhaud or in his *Sixth Quartet,* there is complete independence of the tonal planes, independence to such a degree that each voice of a bi-tonal discourse, for example, pursues and finds its own resolution and has its own cadence. This is not the case with Stravinsky, either in the *Sacre* or in the works which follow it. In Stravinsky's music there is always a strongly affirmed fundamental tonality to which melodic lines and harmonic complexes belonging to a different key temporarily join themselves. But the foreign key is either, in the end, abandoned, or else it melts, in modulating, into the fundamental tonality. . . . Beneath the complexities of a harmonic tissue where two or three different keys are woven together, one always distinguishes the plane of the principal tonality, which finally absorbs the others and affirms itself by a cadence which destroys all doubt".

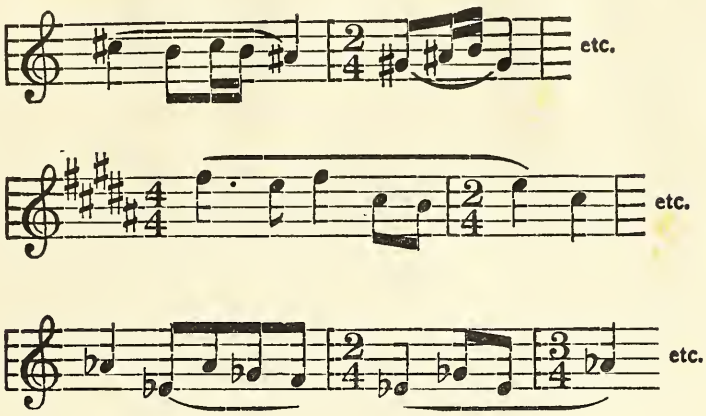
The sort of harmonic perspective which M. de Schloezer describes, is to be found, for instance, in the Prelude to the second part of "The Sacred Rites of Spring". Here, the

[1] In an admirable article on Stravinsky in the 1923, December number of the *Revue Musicale.* This article and the marvellous essay which Ernest Ansermet wrote on Stravinsky's music and which likewise appeared in the *Revue Musicale* must inevitably serve as the starting point for any study of Stravinsky's work.

fundamental key, D minor, is always in the foreground, the foreign tonalities being rigorously confined to secondary planes. Similarly, the frenzied "Dance of the Earth", which concludes the first section of *Sacre* and which likewise contains melodic lines that, like the following,

suggest other keys, is, nevertheless, from the harmonic standpoint, nothing but a gigantic cadence in C major. It would be useless to multiply examples further. If any additional evidence were necessary to establish the underlying tonal basis of Stravinsky's music, it could be found abundantly in the later works, each succeeding one of which indicates an increasingly marked evolution toward an art of single and sharply defined tonalities.

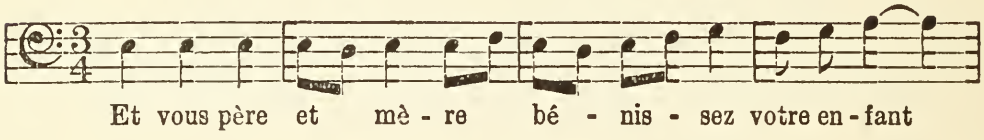
Like any powerful personality, Stravinsky has absorbed and assimilated the most diverse and conflicting influences. In the early works, we find traces of "The Five"; of Glazounow. (In the Symphony in E♭, 1905-07), Scriabine and Wagner (*Études,* Op. 7, 1908; and *The Firebird*), Rimsky-Korsakow (*Fireworks,* 1908; and *The Firebird*), Debussy, (*The Faun and the Shepherdess,* 1907, *The Firebird,* and in certain impressionistic, overlapping harmonies in *Petrouchka*), and Schoenberg (*Three Japanese Lyrics,* 1912).

In the compositions written between 1910 and 1917 there is a prolonged and fruitful influence of the Russian folk song, noticeable in the plagal character of the melodies—that is, their insistance on the interval of the fourth —in the diatonic structure and the rhythmical freedom of the themes and in their frequent modal qualities. Often

Stravinsky takes his themes bodily from the folk-lore of his country. For example, the following melodies from "The Sacred Rites of Spring",

are all, according to M. de Schloezer (who is Russian himself and a well qualified authority in the matter) of folk origin.

On the other hand, "the themes of *Petrouchka*", says M. de Schloezer, "are not, for the most part, of village or peasant origin; nor are they fundamentally Russian. They represent rather the music of the town, of the city folk, who have already assimilated a good bit of western musical culture, if only in the form of waltzes such as the one by Lahner which occurs in the first tableau of *Petrouchka.* The result is a strange but homogeneous and organic compound of polkas and German waltzes, churned out by a hurdy-gurdy; of gypsy romances, sung by nomad artists, and of Russian dance rhythms. To-day, in the provinces, even after the Revolution, we can distinguish the echoes of this musical life which, ten years after *Petrouchka,* has once more inspired Stravinsky in *Mavra* (1922). The themes of *Petrouchka,* then, are not, properly speaking, Stravinsky's own. . . . The dances of the drunkards, of the coachmen, of the merchant and the two gypsies—we

Russians have known all that since childhood. It is material which belongs to everyone; but Stravinsky, in amalgamating and organizing these diverse elements, has made them his own and given them new value and significance".

In *The Wedding* it is difficult, I confess, to trace the precise limits between the melodies which Stravinsky has created himself and those which he has borrowed from the genius of the folk. In the second tableau, the refrain on a liturgical text that the friends of the groom sing, is in reality a soldier song which in the original has no religious character whatsoever. This phrase of the groom's

is sung in Russia at the mass for the dead. For Stravinsky, it sufficed to make a few almost imperceptible changes to modify its funereal character without destroying the grave, religious quality of the melody.

The importance of the part which his native folk-songs play in his works is only one of the many distinctly Russian aspects of Stravinsky's music. Equally Russian is the Asiatic splendor and color, the unparalleled luxuriance of its orchestration, an art, the elements of which Stravinsky learned from Rimsky-Korsakow and in which he is unexcelled by anyone. Intensely Russian, also, is the sombre nostalgia, the sullen immobility and that inscrutable sense of fatalism which we find in compositions like "The Firebird", "The Sacred Rites of Spring", "The Wedding" and in the paradoxical tragi-gaiety of "Petrouchka". It would be difficult to imagine a work more genial, more irresistibly gay than "Petrouchka" and, at the same time, more profoundly tragic. I cannot listen to the music without

recalling my first impressions of Russia when I visited that country shortly before the war. On reaching the frontier, we found the little station crowded with peasants, some of them alert and expectant, their eyes wide open, sparkling and full of vivacity, in short, happy, gay; others sad, but so sad that they gave you the feeling that human sorrow is, after all, an infinite thing. And in every face one could read the incomprehension of these simple folk, their helpless acceptance of life. Instinctively one realized that their happiness, like their sorrow, was unmotivated. They were simply gay or sad—nothing more. For the rest, well, "nitchevo" as the Russians say, "That has no importance". It was an unforgettable impression.

In the later works "Mavra" (1918), "Pulcinella" (1919) "Ragtime", the "Octet for Wind Instruments" (1923), the "Concerto" (1924), and the "Sonata" (1924) for piano, the Russian folk-song has given way to other influences. In "Pulcinella", for instance, Stravinsky has taken melodies by Pergolese, harmonized them in a distinctly modern style and made them over into something quite new and original. The work is a *pastiche,* if you wish, but a *pastiche* of genius. The "Octet" turns, for inspiration, to the airs of Rossini; "Mavra", an *opera-buffa,* glorifies what de Schloezer wittily calls the "Italo-Tzigano-Russian" romance. And in "Ragtime", of course, it is your American jazz rhythms that form the basis of the music.

Syncopation has always fascinated Stravinsky. There are marked traces of it in "Petrouchka", in "The Sacred Rites of Spring", and it is employed extensively in "The Wedding". But perhaps the most interesting examples of jazz rhythms are to be found not in any of these works,

nor in "Ragtime", but in the "Piano-Concerto", for here they have been woven into a style of counterpoint which, in spite of its dissonance and modernity, suggests unmistakably and at once, the polyphony of Bach. Strange as it may seem, the fusion results in not the slightest incongruity. It is as effective as it was unexpected.

In the "Piano-Sonata", his last published work, the influence of Bach is at once subtler and deeper than ever before. The work, like the Preludes and Fugues of the great Cantor, is conceived in blocks and is distinctly architectonic in character. It has no "expressive" intentions, in the romantic sense of the word. The nuances are very simple, the dynamics consisting, even in the slow movement, only of simple oppositions of *fortes* and *pianos* and an occasional *pianissimo.* On the other hand, differences in touch or attack are sharply contrasted. The left hand, for instance, plays *staccato,* and the right, *legato,* or *vice versa.* The first and last movements, at least half of which utilizes but two voices, one in each hand, may be considered as representing a development and modernization of the two-part, contrapuntal style of writing that we associate with Bach's "French and English Suites". The extraordinary life and interest of the work reside, as they do in Bach's music, in the style itself, in the vitality of lines which are perpetually in movement, are forever unfolding and renewing themselves. In the long history of music, one encounters a great many works of the "mosaic" type, that is, works which proceed by the juxtaposition and variation of short phrases, but extremely rare are compositions where the lines develop from within, grow out of themselves, as they do here, naturally, easily and with inexhaustible fecundity.

Stravinsky is a master craftsman. Each one of his works brings us, in addition to those intense joys which only the supreme works of art can give, the solution of some technical problem, of some difficulty of his "trade" which, in writing his music, he has incidentally mastered. Sometimes he sets the task for himself quite consciously and then we get tiny marvels of craftsmanship like the "Five" and the "Three Easy Pieces for Piano—Four Hands" which are marked respectively "right hand" and "left hand easy". More often, however, I imagine the task is an incidental one, which is accomplished as a matter of course, simply because the realization of his ideas demands that he accomplish it. However that may be, two things are certain: first, that Stravinsky's music has solved many and extraordinarily diverse problems; and secondly, that the man has shown marvellous versatility in adapting his personality to so great a variety of subjects.

From the historical point of view, Stravinsky's music represents a sharp reaction against the subtle and vaporous sonorities of Debussy's impressionism and a powerful impetus in the direction of a return to classic traditions. Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, music has been more or less autobiographical, has dealt with the feelings or impressions of the individual. Its beauty and power have lain in its expressive qualities, in the intensity and fidelity with which it has reflected the emotional life of the composer, rather than in any objective values of form or structure.

In Stravinsky's music, however, the individual or personal note is relatively absent. Consciously or unconsciously he has sought and found again the secret of classic art, of an art whose movement and life are in the music itself,

not in any qualities of "expression". Even when he is expressive, Stravinsky remains quite impersonal.[1]

Here he was aided partly, perhaps, by his Russian heredity; for, if one stops to think of Russian opera, for instance, one realizes that the most successful episodes, even in so great a masterpiece as Boris Godounow, are rarely personal in character. The greatest scenes usually represent some large, general, collective emotion and excel rather in the more or less objective beauties of the gorgeous and the spectacular. In this respect, "Petrouchka" and "The Sacred Rites of Spring", for example, are thoroughly Russian as well as classic. They deal with the feelings of the group; they speak for the crowd, not for the individual.

For those who happen to know only the *Sacre,* it may seem strange indeed to speak of Stravinsky as a classicist, for the primitivism of *Sacre* or, if you prefer, its naturalism, is certainly not a "classical" tendency. But in this connection, one must remember the circumstances under which the work was written, and must place it in its proper historical setting, namely, against the background of impressionistic and romantic art. As M. de Schloezer has said: "It was necessary to return to nature and to forget man, or, at least, to reduce him to nothing more than an element of primitive nature, to treat him as a rock or a plant. The rudeness of *Sacre,* its disdain for everything which charms or pleases, its stinging brutalities—all that was necessary, for it was a question of killing sentiment, of destroying all subjective emotion and of making things act directly and by themselves". Furthermore, "The Sacred

[1] *Generally* speaking. Naturally one can find exceptions to this, as to any other classification. There are "personal" moments in Stravinsky's music just as there are "impersonal" moments in the music of the nineteenth century. But, as a large generalisation, the opposition which we have established between the romantic era and the music of Stravinsky is real and easily discernible.

Rites of Spring", is Stravinsky's only excursion into the realm of naturalistic art and occupies, for that reason, a place apart from the rest of his works.

If, as in "The Wedding", Stravinsky again approaches the world of primitive peoples, it is to raise them higher in the scale of human values, to give their humble lives new and transcendent dignity. Here, in *"Noces"*, simple, peasant folk become figures of truly epic grandeur. "The Bride", "The Groom", "The Father", "The Mother" are not obscure individuals but representative types, who speak, in accents as noble as they are touching and profound, for all men and all times. Only to the very great has it been permitted, in the past, to achieve such heights of universal beauty. That Stravinsky should have done so is no small tribute to the greatness of his genius and a certain indication of the classic and enduring qualities of his art.

NADIA BOULANGER.

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